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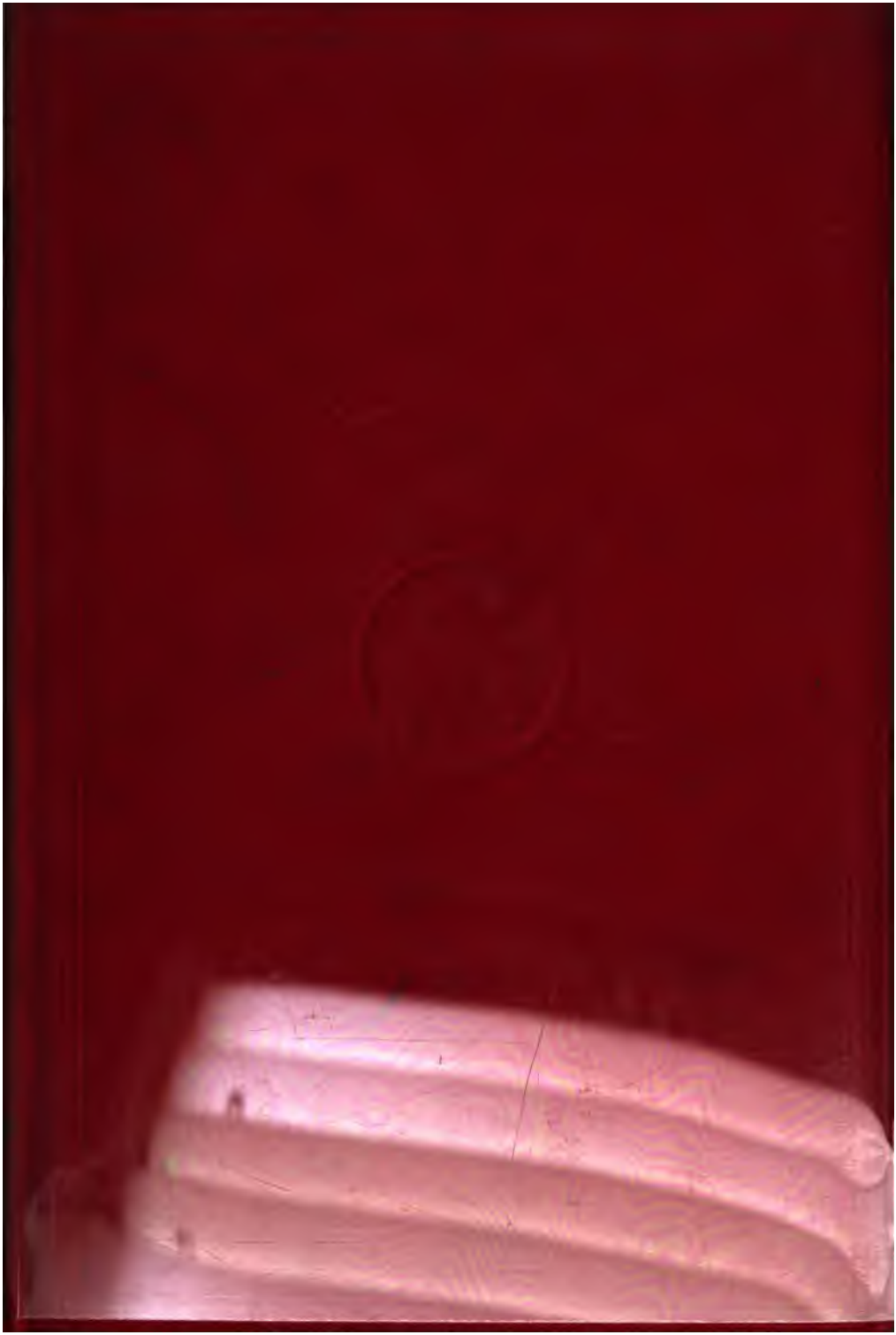

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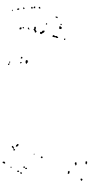

THE AFGHAN KNIFE.

BY

ROBERT ARMITAGE STERNDALE, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF

"SEONEE; OR, CAMP LIFE ON THE SATPURA RANGE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, AND RIVINGTON,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1879.

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LONDON:
GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

Dedicated,

BY PERMISSION, TO

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE

OF

MANY KINDNESSES.

A STROKE OF AN AFGHAN KNIFE.

CHAPTER I.

On a calm evening in spring, just before the commencement of the hot weather, as the summer is popularly termed in India, a crowd of men, women, and children occupied the roads and outskirts of the town of Sasseram, in the Bengal province of Behar.

The assembly was entirely composed of Mahomedans, chiefly of the middle and lower classes, and all were eagerly gazing, as if they were expecting some portentous sign, at one point in the sky, a little above the western horizon. They were, in fact, looking for the new moon; for it was the first day of the tenth month of Shawul, the feast of the Id-ool-Fitr, or Ramazan, the Easter of the Mahomedan Lent.

For thirty days had each member of that large assembly kept a rigorous fast. Between the rising and the setting of the sun not even a drop of water was permitted to pass the parched lips, a rigid rule by which the weak and dyspeptic suffered to a degree that was hardly realized by the strong and healthy, to whom the abundant evening meal compensated for enforced abstinence during the day. Only in the case of the grievously ill, the delicate mother, and the tender infant, is the rigour of the imposition in any degree relaxed; those who wish to avoid the purgatorial Jehannum of the Moslem, and to avail themselves of the privileges of that blessed month in which the Quran began to be revealed, the month in which the gates of hell are shut and those of paradise thrown invitingly open, the month in which past venial sins will meet with pardon, must keep the fast in all its entirety, with numerous prayers and study of the sacred scriptures, with self-mortification and seclusion from mundane enjoyments.

On those of religious minds, whose con-

dition in life will admit of the leisure, it is incumbent to remain in a corner of the mosque, secluded by a curtain, absorbed in contemplation, or engaged in praise of the Almighty, and in the recital of the Quran in an audible voice.

For others, whose daily avocations will not allow of the whole month's seclusion, a shorter period, from fifteen to three days and nights, is considered commendable. All must, however, observe this rule on the last day of the fast.

In this favoured month falls the Laylut-ut-Qadr, or "night of power," in which the Quran descended,—a night kept purposely hid in mystery by the Prophet, who says,

Upon the night of power to man 'twas borne,[1]
And what the night of power is who thee telleth ?
The night of power a thousand nights excelleth ;
Angels descend, and by the Lord's behest,
The spirit Gabriel teacheth what is best,
And all is peace until the rising morn.

During this night all the animal and vegetable kingdom bow to the Creator of the universe, and for a moment of time the waters of the ocean become sweet. Happy

[1] The Quran, commonly called Koran.

the man to whom the mysteries of that sacred eve are unfolded, and great is his power; he can kill the living, raise the dead, and transport himself whithersoever he will.

As, however, nobody can tell which is the night of power, the Prophet having imparted it only to some of his companions, with whom the secret died; the learned conjecture it to be the twenty-seventh of the month of Ramazan, but there are four other dates between the twenty-first and twenty-ninth on which it might fall; thus, the uncertainty remains.

However, the period of fasting and mortification was now over, and those who felt happy in the thought of having religiously kept their sacred obligations were looking forward to a season of festivity.

All those eager watchers of the western horizon were clad in their best attire. Even the poorest wore some clean, if not new, garment, and the eyes of all were anointed with *soorma*.[2]

Amongst the various groups was one composed of an old man of venerable

[2] Black Antimony.

aspect, a youth of handsome, open, and almost feminine features, an old hunchback of shrewd countenance, and a tall, fair man with aquiline nose, sharp, restless eyes, and a compressed mouth, of mobile character which could adapt itself with equal readiness to a cynical sneer, or the most insinuating smile, according to circumstances.

There was a resemblance in his face to those of the other three, but in a more striking degree to that of the hunchback.

The attire of this personage was far superior to that of his companions, who were clad in clean white linen; there was a leaning to Europeanism in it. His coat was of fine English cloth, though shaped after the manner of his countrymen, and his cap was of green velvet elaborately embroidered with the gold work of Benares; but instead of the loose *pyjamas* and broad up-turned slippers of the orthodox Moslems, he wore the straighter cut trouser and highly varnished shoes of their western rulers. Other evidences of his higher civilization and condition were apparent in

his massive gold watch and chain, and double eye-glass.

His companions paid him the utmost deference, although, as our reader may have guessed, this fine gentleman amongst the simple country folk was none else than the son of the hunchback, and nephew of the other old man. But then he was a Deputy Magistrate, and a "Dipty" is an awful personage amongst his native neighbours and kinsfolk in the country. But apart from his rank there were other weighty reasons for the general deference paid to Moonshi Karīm-ūllah.

Born on a Friday night under the influence of the planet Jupiter (although it was a question whether the hour had not verged on that presided over by Mars), a planet under whose auspices wealth, power, and wisdom were to be attained, the proud father, who was a *Muhafiz dufter*, or record-keeper, in the district-magistrate's office, registered a vow that he would devote his savings to the education of his son in such a way as to ensure his high fortune.

Had not his prayers and his endeavours been answered? The boy, who showed a singular aptitude for learning, was master, at an early age, of all that his father could teach him, whilst he attained the rudiments of English from a Bengali writer in the magistrate's office.

Acting on the advice of this friend, Sheikh Gholam Nabi determined to send his son to Calcutta, as the only place where he could get his education perfected. Therefore, despite the misgivings and wailings of his worthy spouse, to whom such a journey seemed worse than a Polar expedition would seem to a British village matron, the worthy Muhafiz dufter, who ruled his household with a rod of iron, packed off his son under the wing of a distant cousin, an inspector of police, who was going up to the capital with evidence in a murder case.

In the City of Palaces the youth made friends, and was introduced by the Principal of the College to various Englishmen of rank as his most promising pupil. The example of the Hindoo students

who were mastering Mill's Logic and reciting passages from Milton and Shakespeare, caused him to leave the study of the Mahomedan theological writers, with whom he had been hitherto more familiar, and to wander away in the more varied and pleasant fields that were now opened out before him. It may be supposed that he gained much of this worldly wisdom at the expense of his piety, for though he outwardly conformed to the requirements of his religion, his faith in it was considerably shaken, and a ham sandwich and glass of champagne or eau de vie with his harum-scarum young friend Baboo Doorga Nando Bysach, who lived in various garden houses in the suburbs in rotation, and drove a dashing mail phæton, did not present the same difficulties they would have done a few years previously.

However, these youthful escapades were rectified in after-life, and their hero assumed, outwardly at all events, that rigid piety which alone can command the respect of his co-religionists—for Karīmullah was ambitious, and when he came to

think seriously of the course in life which he was to follow, he knew well that laxity in religious principles, and fellowship with unbelievers, would seriously impair his influence with his own people.

Amongst other creeds and nationalities the man of genius will always have a certain following, be his religious principles what they may, but in Islam no scepticism is tolerated—a man may become a leader of men, but he can only do so under religious impulses. He may lead them into new paths, but the wayside must be strewn with flowers of faith, and not the thorns and prickles of doubt and unbelief.

About the time his studies were completed, one of the Englishmen to whose notice the Principal of his College had recommended him, gave him an appointment on probation, and shortly afterwards he was transferred to a more valuable post than usually falls to the lot of a youth of his age—but Karim-ullah's star was in the ascendant, and never was there so old a head on young shoulders,—his promotion was rapid, and he was an universal

favourite;—his assiduity was noticeable, and his manners were insinuating without being obsequious—deferential to his superiors, courteous to his inferiors, he worked his way on, and at thirty-five occupied one of the most honourable posts to which he could have aspired.

But was that all to which he might aspire?

Was it all to which he did aspire?

He would have been a clever physiognomist who could have gathered anything from that astute Oriental's face, if the question were put—whilst the answer that Allah had been very gracious to him came purring from his lips.

We have been so much occupied with the chief personage of our group as to forget the others. The eldest of the party was a man of about seventy years of age, and of singularly benign appearance—and indeed Sheikh Rehmat-ūllah had the enviable reputation amongst his countrymen of being a man in whom there was no guile. None doubted his word nor gainsayed his decision as an arbitrator, an

office he was frequently called upon to undertake—he was a *hakīm*, or doctor of medicine, by profession, but as medical adviser to a native noble, he has been rewarded with a small estate, the revenue of which sufficed to keep him now in comfort, and his professional services were given gratis to the poor of Hindus and Mahomedans alike—one could not say that his charity was unbounded, because his wealth was limited, but the greater part of his moderate income flowed out in a channel of benevolence, which at times threatened to drain his resources dry. "God will provide," was his motto, one might almost have supposed that he based his conduct on our Saviour's exhortation to His disciples, to take no heed for the morrow, but that the Anjeel, or Gospel of the Christians, was unknown to him. He was, however, an earnest follower of his own scriptures, and do they not say "what harm can befall those who believe in God and the last day, and give alms out of that which God hath bestowed on them?" since God knoweth them who do this. "Verily, God will not

wrong any one, even the weight of an ant, and if it be a good action He will double it and will recompense it in His sight with a great reward."[3]

Almsgiving is one of the foundations of the Mahomedan faith—a true follower of the Prophet must give tithes of all he possesses beyond a fixed minimum. "Prayer," said Omar II., "will bring a man half way to God, and fasting to the door of His palace, but alms alone will gain him admission." But the obligatory duty is not the charity which the Quran in various places enjoins, and which Omar praised in a strange coincidence of expression with the apostle's: "Now abideth these three, faith, hope, and charity, but the greatest of these is charity." Most Mahomedans give according to the law, but the unostentatious general and daily charity of Sheikh Rehmat-ullah was of an exceptional character, which calls forth universal commendation.

The youth who formed the fourth of the group, was the Hakīm's grandson, and the

[3] Koran, chap. iv.

sole object of the old man's solicitude; he was a studious, thoughtful boy, resembling in many points his grandfather, whose heir he was destined to be.

Whilst the whole attention of the multitude was fixed on the visible sign which was to tell them that the fast was over, Munshi Karim-ullah manifested the utmost indifference to the sky, but now and then consulted his watch with pompous gravity, and cast an occasional glance towards the telegraph office, which was visible in the distance. After a while a man was seen to emerge from the office-door and run towards the crowd. As he came near, it was perceived by his shoulder-belt and brass badge, that he was a government peon or orderly, and all eyes were concentrated for a time on him, as he approached the Deputy Magistrate, and delivered to him the little reddish envelope which contained a telegram. The Munshi opened it, and read in a loud voice, "From Moulvi Habīb-ullah of Delhi. In the name of God the Most Merciful, the compassionate, the moon hath been seen, the Feast hath

begun, compliments and felicitations." The crowd gathered round, and the news soon spread that the Dipty-Sahib had received a telegram from Delhi, and that the moon had appeared. And when, some time afterwards, the pale crescent was just discernible ere it dipped into the western mists, half the assemblage had gone to prepare for the enjoyment of the evening and the edge of the discovery was considerably taken off.

Amongst those who waited to see the heavenly sign were the old Hakīm and his grandson.

"The telegraph," said the old man, "is a wonderful thing, and new marvels arise every day, but on such an occasion as this, I like to see with mine own eyes the signal that Allah himself gives to the Faithful, for threescore and ten years have I looked on this night for the sign, and it is not befitting that I should now turn to modern inventions."

So the Munshi and his father betook themselves home to prepare for the even-

ing repast, promising to meet the others by-and-by.

Sheikh Rehmat-ūllah waited till the moon appeared, and then, leaning on his grandson's shoulder, he turned his steps homewards.

"Dada," asked the boy, "how did the Munshi Sahib get news of the moon before we saw it?"

"Meré jān," replied the grandfather, "the Munshi Sahib has much learning in Frankish science, and he knew that by sending to a place where the skies are clearer, he might have the news flashed down by the lightning that they use in their mechanism. Here, on account of the late rain, our sky has been somewhat overcast, but in the Punjab the atmosphere is dry, and I have known by letters from friends, that the moon has been visible to them before we could see it. However, Allah has been gracious to us to-night, praise be to His name."

"Dada, I should like to work a telegraph."

"Astagfur ullah! what art thou saying? Son! give not thy attention to magical arts, lest they overcome thee in an evil hour." And the old man muttered to himself the 113th chapter of the Quran[4] whilst the youth walked on in silence, knowing that it was useless to provoke a discussion with his grandfather on such a subject; it was no use to explain to him what he had already learnt in the English elementary school books concerning the science of electricity. The occult sciences are not unusually affected amongst native physicians, for the casting out of devils is a part of their profession, under which art comes the treatment of Epilepsy, Hysteria, Hypochondriasis, and other nervous diseases, which in the east are attributed to Satanic influences. Rehmat-ullah Hakīm in such cases prescribed such drugs as he thought

[4] "Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the daybreak, that he may deliver me from the mischief of those things which he hath created, from the mischief of the night when it cometh on, and from the mischief of women blowing on knots, and from the mischief of the envious when he envieth."

would meet the requirements of the case, and counteracted the action of the powers of darkness by writing various sentences from the Quran on slips of paper, one of which was washed clean in water, which was swallowed with each dose of the medicine; beyond this he would not go, for the tenets of his sect forbade dealing in magic.

The worthy physician had long been a consistent and fervent follower of Mahomed ebn Wahab, the great reformer or rather restorer of his faith, and despite the cloud under which the sect exists under the British rule, had not hesitated to avow himself a Wahabi. To call a man a Wahabi is to nine-tenths of Englishmen in India to call him a fanatic and a rebel, a sort of Mahomedan Fenian, one whom the police should take under special surveillance, whose every action is open to suspicion; it was therefore bold, if not rash, of Sheikh Rehmat-ullah to calmly acknowledge himself, whenever occasion demanded it, as one of that so-called treasonable sect.

CHAPTER II.

It may be necessary for the purposes of our narrative to explain what a Wahabi is, and why he should be an object of suspicion. We must, therefore, crave our readers' patience whilst we attempt a brief review of the history of the sect. About the beginning of the eighteenth century, long after Luther had fought his glorious fight against the errors of his Church, there arose a Luther in Islam. Mahomedanism at that period, as it is in great measure even now, was, like the Church of Christ in the time of our great reformer, overlaid with a moss-growth of error and superstitious innovation, which had well-nigh hidden the original form of the institution, and practices had arisen which were in opposition to the written law of the Prophet.

In many respects the changes were analogous to those in the Roman Church. There was the Quran or original revelation, corresponding to our Old Testament, then the Hadīs or traditions, a record of the sayings and doings of Mahomed, which took the place of our Gospels; and these were the orthodox scriptures of Islam; but in course of time there arose a priesthood, or body of elders gaining ascendancy over the minds of men, and they set themselves up as interpreters and exponents of the written law; and then the more austere and prominent amongst them were dignified with the title of *Wati*, or saint,—divine honours were paid to their shrines on their decease, and wonderful miracles were attributed to them. The sect of the Shias too, had gone so far as to state that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and in their opinion his successor, was an incarnation of the Deity, and as many prayers were offered to saints as to the Creator.

The similarity in the history of the two religions so far is very striking. Supervening on the Quran and Hadīs, the ortha-

dox scriptures, came two other rulings of faith, viz. Ijmā, or dogmatic opinions of divines in council, and Qias, or comparison or analogical reasoning, by which passages in the Quran and Hadīs were laid open to conjectural application.

It will be seen by what we have just stated that the Mahomedan faith is not entirely, as is commonly supposed, founded on the Quran alone, although that pretended revelation forms the basis of the structure.

In the interpretation of the scriptures given to the people by the clergy, and in the extravagant honours paid to the saints, the religion of Islam at the beginning of the eighteenth century resembled, as we have observed, the state of the Catholic Church prior to the Reformation. In Arabia the backsliding had been great indeed; to quote the words of one who obtained information not only from an extensive acquaintance with oriental literature, but from traditions gathered at the risk of his life on the spot:[1] "Almost every trace of

[1] Palgrave.

Islam had long since vanished from Nejed, where the worship of the Djann, under the spreading foliage of large trees, or in the cavernous recesses of Djebel Toweyk, along with the invocation of the dead and sacrifices at their tombs, was blended with remnants of old Sabæan superstition (not without positive traces of the doctrines of Moseylemah and Kermoot); the Quran was unread, the five daily prayers forgotten, and no one cared where Mecca lay, east or west, north or south; tithes, ablutions, and pilgrimages were things unheard of."

It was then there was born to one Abd-el-Wahāb a son, whom he called Mahomed, and who was destined to restore Islamism in its strictest form. Mahomed ebn Abd-el-Wahāb was according to some writers well instructed by his father in the Quran and Hadīs, and when he came to years of discretion a naturally religious turn of mind, added to an exceptional keenness of perception, caused him to analyze the precepts of his faith, and to perceive their glaring divergence from the Prophet's original intentions. Some authors assert

that he gained his religious training from one Sheikh Abd-ullah at Medina; others that his convictions were strengthened by intercourse with the bigoted Hambali divines of Damascus; certain it appears that in his travels as a merchant he saw much and learned much, and then in his own mind evolved the line of action to which he devoted his life.

His creed should be a pure Theism—La Ilāh illa Allāh—there is no God but God—there is nothing approaching to him in divinity, nothing which comes near him—an autocratical, unapproachable Being—no mediator could be allowed between the awful majesty of the Creator and the humblest of His creatures—to call a man a holy man or a saint was a blasphemy. Even the Prophet had no power given to him to intercede for his people during their lives, though at the last day he might be permitted to do so. The decisions of men were not to be binding in matters of doctrine against a man's own judgment in the perusal of the Quran and sacred Hadīs.

That no prayers should be offered to saints, nor their shrines worshipped, made offerings to, or illuminated.

That rosaries[2] should not be used in the repetition of the ninety-nine names of the Almighty.

The theological student will not fail to see in the above the great similarity in the Wahabi reaction to that which took place in Catholic Europe. Mahomed ebn Abd-el-Wahāb bided his time till a favourable opportunity offered, and in the meanwhile removed from his native village of Hareymela to the town of Eyanah. At last one day hearing a man in the market-place lamenting the loss of a camel and calling on the patron-saint of the place to restore it to him, the indignant Wahabi could no longer restrain himself, but told the loser in loud tones to call rather on the God of the saint. The ice was broken and discussion followed, which brought many

[2] It is supposed by some that the Mahomedans got the use of the rosary from the Buddhists, and that the Roman Catholics took it from the Saracens, though they ascribe its invention to St. Dominic.

to his side, but being ultimately expelled the town by the governor, the reformer took refuge with the chief of Derey'eeyah Saood ebn Abd-el-Azīz, whom he converted, and whose ambitious views were fanned till the sword was drawn, which has reddened in the cause till this day. Ere the great Wahabi died he saw fulfilled that promise which he as a refugee made to the Arab chief, that did he but dedicate his sword to God and the cause, "he should be sole monarch in Nejed and the first potentate in Arabia."[3]

Of course, like all converts to a new faith the Wahabis exercised little moderation; like the Puritans of our country "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon" was the great argument—aut Wahabi, aut nullus. Like our Puritan Roundheads, they despoiled the mosques of their decorations, and broke down the shrines of the saints; music and dancing were prohibited; tobacco-smoking was considered a mortal sin; the name of God was perpetually on their lips in pious

[3] Palgrave.

ejaculations, whilst the blackest treachery lurked in their hearts. At the hour of prayer, the streets, houses, and shops were deserted, whilst their occupants hurried to the mosques for prayers, and woe be to the wretch whose absence was noted by the watchful monitors—no croppy was ever more admonished by worthy brother "Stand-fast-in-the-Faith Thwackum" than was that unfortunate Moslem backslider.

This, however, was the abuse, the caricature, of the movement, the out-Heroding of Herod; it is probable that could Mahomed ebn Abd-el-Wahab have lived long enough, he would have toned down such excessive bigotry, for he was a man of great breadth of view, but the strictness with which he deemed it necessary to put a stop to the abuses which had crept into his religion, was afterwards not mitigated, but increased by the ardour of his followers.

In India this excessive severity could not be developed, for the Wahabis have ever been in the minority, and without any voice in the administration of affairs.

They have therefore, under the wholesome check of a stronger government, been able only to rule themselves on their moral obligations to themselves and their own sect, without being able to proselytize by force or domineer over their neighbours whose ways of thinking happen to differ from their own; nay more, being in a manner suspected of a great amount of fanaticism and capability for intrigue, they have been carefully watched, and we may say coerced.

Their history in India commences from the time of one Syed Ahmed, who was born in 1786, and who, after living the life of a freebooter for some time, began to study divinity in 1816. During a pilgrimage to Mecca, he was converted to Wahābism, and, on his return to India he assiduously propagated the new (or rather revived) doctrine.

There was little chance of Syed Ahmed's founding a new kingdom in British India, after the fashion of the son of Abd-el-Wahab in Arabia, and so he conceived the idea of attacking the infidel

Sikhs and trying to carve out for himself a destiny similar to that of his prototype of Nejed.

In 1831 he was slain at the battle of Bālakot, and though his followers carried on a desultory war against the Sikhs, they had not much success, and finally the annexation of the Punjab by the British put an end to their crusade. But they got the character of being turbulent fanatics, and a new phase in the history of the country attached this character to them still more prominently.

So long as their warlike operations were carried on against a foreign nation, the Sikhs for example, our government did not attempt to interfere with them, and they were unmolested in their levying of men and contributions of money, purchases of munitions of war, &c., but after the great rebellion of 1857-9, there was formed a camp of rebel Hindustanis on the Punjab frontier at Sittana, and they were for a time a source of disquietude to the British Government; there were in all probability some Wahabis amongst them, but the

colony was composed of rebels of various creeds, and was by no means a homogeneous mass.

It is natural to suppose that the relatives of these men sent pecuniary aid to them, and such assistance could but be construed into active sympathy by an alien government, which from its position was in a manner forced to be suspicious, and the Wahabis, from their supposed crusading proclivities and from their former action on the frontier, fell especially under this suspicion as a body, whether rightly or wrongly we will not attempt to discuss just now.

The brief sketch just given has sufficed for the purposes of our story to show that for such a man as Sheikh Rehmat-ullah to avow himself openly a Wahabi, required a certain amount of courage.

His adoption of the purer faith had to a great extent estranged him, so far as religious matters were concerned, from the rest of his relatives, who were Mahomedans of the Hanifa sect, who are, as we may say, the Spanish Catholics of Islam in

their bigotry and saint worship. The only male member of his family who was of his own way of thinking was his young grandson Abdul Rahīm, whom he had carefully brought up in his own views, and in whom the old man's affections were centred.

CHAPTER III.

As the old physician, supported by his grandson, on whose shoulder he leaned, neared his own quarter, the two passed a large sheet of water, or tank, in the centre of which, built as it were on an island, rose a massive pile surmounted by a dome—it was one of several tombs which exist in the vicinity of Sasseram, and which after the fashion of the Moghul nobles were built with a view to preserve the memory of the deceased from oblivion by the very prominent features they formed in the landscape. At Delhi and Lahore the traveller cannot fail to be struck by the magnitude and grandeur of some of these mausolea.[1]

[1] Most of those at Lahore had been desecrated by the Sikhs before the British took possession; but the latter, with a truly Utilitarian spirit, turned many of them into dwelling-houses, and even one (the tomb of a murdered slave-girl) into a Christian church!

This was a remarkably noble specimen, and covered the remains of Shere Shah the Afghan, the conqueror of the Emperor.

The gloom of night was settling over the land, and through it the dome loomed stern and majestic, whilst the black shadow at its base seemed like a deep gulf as the surface of the water on either side was lit up by the faint after-glow of the brief Indian twilight. "My life!" said the old man to his young companion, "see the folly of wasting wealth, which Allah commands us to give to the poor, on a house, nay, a palace, for a handful of dust; out of a handful of dust God created us great and small, and to that handful must we return; it is better that money should be given to the poor, or for charitable purposes, than that such an empty pile as this should mock us with a bitter mockery of departed greatness." "The best tombs are those which do not exist," was uttered in a loud voice in the Arabic tongue, so close to them that both the youth and his grandsire started with momentary alarm—for the maxim of the Arabian iconoclasts was de-

livered with such energy and in such unexpected proximity, that for a moment it seemed as though the spirit of the silent tomb had burst out with an ironical confirmation of the Hakīm's speech to his grandson. It was, however, no spirit which spoke on this occasion, but a stern-looking man, tall and erect, who with a long staff in his hand, which he seemed hardly to need for support, seemed, from his way-worn and dusty appearance, to have come from a great distance.

"Ya Allah!" he repeated, "it is true, the best tombs are those which exist not. Yes," he continued, rolling out his words in a deep guttural growl, "yes, the curse of the Prophet light on those who would turn to idolatry again, who build tombs of saints, and worship them as gods; La-il la-ha, Il-lal-la-ho! then turning abruptly to the hakīm, he grunted, "Salām aleekūm."

"Aleekūm Salām," replied the old man. "Your worship has travelled far to-day."

"Yes, Mēah, about forty miles; do you know one Sheikh Rehmāt-ullah Hakīm of this place?"

"I am that eater of dust that standeth before you, Haji Sahib."

"Allah Shookr!" replied the stranger, "then I have not far to go to seek thee, and in truth I had no fancy to go prowling about, asking every gaping townsman who might wish to know more than I care to tell him, but I have got a note for thee, Hakīm Sahib, from," added he, lowering his voice, "Maulavi Mahbūb Ali."

"May God be gracious to him and thee also," replied Sheikh Rehmat-ullah; "all that I have in my house is at your service; yet, Haji Sahib, your slave is in trouble about one thing. Son," turning to the youth, "go a little way off till I call thee; I have something to say that it were best thou shouldst not hear yet, though after a while I may entrust it to thee."

When Abdal had removed to a short distance, and was out of hearing, the old physician continued.

"Yes, Haji Sahib, your slave is in trouble about one thing; you doubtless wish to stay as much in privacy as possible."

"True it is," interposed the other.

"And you would not care to spend the evening in company with an officer of Government."

"Astag-fur-ulluh! No!" grunted the stranger.

"Well, as ill-luck will have it, I have this evening dining with me a brother of the Hunifa sect" (the stranger growled something like an imprecation), "and his son who is high in favour of the British Government, a deputy magistrate."

"I know," replied the other, "Munshi Karīm-ullah, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Well, I must see him some time or other, but not to-night, no, that would not do. Well, Hakim Sahib, it will not do for me to dine with thee to-night, but any sort of shelter would do; if there were any way of getting across to this old tomb, I might stay there the night; many a worse billet I have had in my day."

"Nay, but Haji Sahib," answered the other, "that would not do, I did but mean to ask thee to excuse the dinner to-night, if so be that you would rather keep quiet.

I have a small room in my house wherein no one enters, where I keep my drugs and a few books on pharmacy, and there you will be quite safe from intrusion."

"Enough, enough," cried the other, "that will do very well for me, in truth I had no wish to go to any *serai* or public place of resort in a place like this, where fakīrs live in palaces and mortify the flesh on savoury pilaos and soft beds, and call themselves by kingly titles."

This had reference to the fact that the leading family of the place was, like the Prince-Bishops of mediæval days, of a mixed civil and religious character, its members being so-called Fakīrs, retaining in some degree the kafnī or dress of the devotee, with the prefix of Shah or king, usually adopted by Fakirs, but otherwise exercising the rights, privileges, and state, of landed nobility,—the then head of the house, Shah Kabīr-ud-dīn Ahmad, was a man of polished manners, free from the prejudice and austerity which generally belong to ascetics, fond of European society and a good game of chess, and was

consequently *anathema maranatha* of such as were of the stranger's way of thinking.

The old Hakīm recalled his grandson, and courteously requesting the traveller to accompany him, led the way through one of the groves of tall palms which environ Sasseram, to the quarter in which his house was situated.

The dwelling was a comfortable-looking low building with a flat roof; in front was a small verandah, in which it was customary for the old man to sit awhile every morning, instructing his grandson in Arabic and Persian, anon attending to the poor patients, who, afflicted with various diseases, took advantage of the gratuitous aid he was ever ready to afford, and not a few had their physic supplemented by food or raiment. If oft-repeated blessings could but be made to assume a visible form, what wreaths of heavenward-floating incense might not be seen every morning curling round the pillars of that lowly portal, and rising up through the clear vault of ethereal azure above.

Passing through a door in the centre of the verandah, which the old man closed after him, the trio found themselves in a small court-yard or quadrangle, round which were arranged various rooms, one side being devoted to the Zenana, or female apartments, behind which was another walled enclosure or "Zenana-compound" as Anglo-Indians would term it; to the right was the guest-room, to the left a series of small apartments occupied by servants, save the one nearest the Zenana, which formed a study-surgery-laboratory and den of retreat, secure from profane feet and prying eyes, whenever the old Hakīm wished to be alone.

To this sanctum the venerable host led his wayworn guest; and bidding his grandson to keep silence concerning his advent, he dismissed him. Then turning to the stranger, he apologized for the poor accommodation he had to offer, the while unrolling a soft Mirzapore carpet and placing a comfortable bolster ready.

The traveller, from whose lips nothing had proceeded for some minutes, save a

sonorous B'ismillah! as he crossed the threshold, now held out his hand with the customary, "Peace be upon you," on which the host replied, "And likewise on you be peace, and the mercy of God."

He then led his guest into a small inner chamber, where he served him with water wherewithal to wash his hands and feet, and returning to the room made him sit down on the carpet and prayed him to excuse his absence whilst he made arrangements for some refreshment, of which the wayfarer stood in need.

There was a small door communicating with the Zenana, and through this the Hakīm retired, leaving his guest to his own reflections for a while. The stranger was a man of about fifty, with a stern face of a decided Jewish type; dark, restless eyes overhung by deep brows fringed with grizzly tufts of hair, an aquiline nose, high cheek-bones, with hollow furrowed cheeks and a firm compressed mouth, showing great decision of character. His long white beard descended almost to his waist, and together with his unusual stature added

much to his commanding appearance. There was decision in his movements and a restless fire in his eyes which boded a daring and perhaps fanatical spirit. But he was weary with long journeying, and finding himself alone he removed his turban, and stretching out his sinewy arms gave way to a wide yawn ending with a pious "B'ismillah el rehmān el rahēm," after which he proceeded leisurely and with somewhat of a contemptuous expression to survey the contents of the apartment. There was not much to see, for the furniture consisted of a few boxes containing drugs and books, a large carboy of rose-water, and a brass lamp of the shape familiar to us among those exhumed at Pompeii, viz: a tall rod bearing a three-lipped burner.

The disdainful expression of the stranger was not owing to the poverty of the place, but at the thought of the Hakīm's drugs and potions, charms and philtres, for the latter are in oriental countries generally associated with the science of healing, and are reckoned by the stricter Wahabis as sorcery and witchcraft condemned by God

and the Prophet; he had yet to learn that Sheikh Rehmat-ullah despised and rejected the black arts of his fellow-physicians equally with himself, but we doubt not that he would have been none the less scandalized had he known that the worthy Hakīm's library contained several English works on diseases, out of which, aided by his grandson's knowledge of English, he had made copious translations for daily use, and to which he doubtless owed much of his success. Sheikh Rehmāt-ullah was by no means a bigot; though conscientiously strict regarding religious views and observances, he had long allowed the superiority of our system of medical treatment, and had lost no opportunity of making himself acquainted to the utmost of his ability with our hospital practice and pharmacopœia.

Possibly this might have laid him open to a charge of schismatic tendencies amongst members of his own sect, but a good man's works always bear him up in public estimation, and the venerable Shekh-jee was looked upon by his neighbours as an immaculate member of the Ahl-i-Hadīs

or people of the traditions, as the Wahabīs style themselves.

After a short absence the Hakīm re-appeared, followed by his grandson, each bearing a tray on which were a variety of viands; laying these aside for a moment, the youth spread a white cloth or *dastarkhwan* in front of the guest, and proceeded to lay the dishes on it, whilst the old man poured out water into a basin and presented it to the stranger, who, rising, would have prevented these menial offices, had not his host insisted on them, taking as the greater honour to his guest, the most servile of the duties of hospitality.

The ablution ended, the two elders sat down, whilst the boy uncovered a savory *pilao*.

Uttering the customary "*B'ismillah*," without which no pious Moslem would commence his dinner, the Hakīm plunged his right hand into the dish, and selecting the most savory morsel, offered it to his guest, after which they both set to work, the stranger with savage energy that showed the want of food he had lately ex-

perienced, and the other more sparingly, eating out of politeness, for he had yet a second meal to undergo.

The youth waited and handed each in turn little cups with savory curries, saucers of chutnees, and flat cakes of unleavened bread; for drink they had water out of cool Bussora goblets, flavoured with peppermint vinegar, a cooling and healthful beverage according to the old doctor's notions.

The meal over, during which the stranger complimented his host repeatedly on the excellence of the dishes he was pressed to partake of, the boy handed round again the ewer and basin, and a saucer of peaflour, with which the elders washed their fingers and then offered up the thanksgiving, "Alhmud-o-lillah!" after which the youth carried away the empty platters and removed the cloth. The host now beckoned to his grandson, and whispered something in his ear, on which he disappeared, and after a while returned with a small tray, on which were two tiny cups and a small pot of coffee.

An exclamation of pleasure burst from the stranger's lips as the unusual luxury was set before them; for in India the use of coffee is unknown to the majority, and has only been introduced in places by the Mecca pilgrims (Hajis) or by Arab settlers. Sheikh Rehmat-ullah had learnt to like it, and had also acquired the art of making it at Bombay, whither he had accompanied his patron, and now on special occasions, such as the present, he produced the fragrant decoction; not such muddy ditch-water as is known to Europeans as coffee, but the strong aromatic essence obtained by careful roasting, bruising, and boiling, which is the coffee of the Arabs.

According to custom the Hakīm tossed off the first out-pouring, and then served his guest, who with an emphatic B'ismillah drained the little cup and smacked his lips with the air of a connoisseur.

"Hakīm Sahib, thou hast been in Arabia?"

"Nay, my lord; if God will, I intend to journey towards the holy place next year. My lord and master, the late Nawab Sahib,

would never part with me, though I wished often to take the journey. He invariably put me off with excuses whenever I prayed him to let me go; but I learnt the use of coffee from the Arab merchants with whom the Nawab Sahib dealt for horses, and esteeming it of high medicinal virtue, as tending to clear the brain and lighten the liver, I have used and prescribed it frequently."

Here the Hakīm poured out a second cup for each, which the traveller swallowed with equal zest, and a third refilling finished the little coffee-pot, after which Sheikh Rehmat-ullah apologized to his guest for leaving him, saying that his absence when the rest of the company arrived might lead to comment and suspicion, and that in the interests of his visitor's welfare it would be better to leave him early and run no risk. So saying, after the customary compliments and blessings, he departed.

The stranger, having performed the necessary ablutions, spread a white cloth over the carpet, and turning towards Mecca

went through the prayers for the night. These done he flung himself carelessly down and was soon in a profound slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

THE old physician had hardly taken his place in the diwān Khana or reception-room, when the guests began to arrive. Each one as he entered left his shoes at the door before he stepped on the rich carpet which was spread for the occasion, and each saluted those in the room with a long "us salam u'alekam" (i.e. the peace of God be with you), to which the host replying "wu 'alekam us salam," welcomed each new comer in turn, by asking after his health, and exchanging mutual compliments and congratulations appropriate to the season of festivity. The Munshi was the last to arrive, and as he entered, the company rose to greet him.

He was most elaborately attired—a *chapkan* of rich plum-coloured shot-silk, with a gorget or rather breast-plate of gold

embroidery of Burhanpūr work, over which he wore an *Alkhālig* of fine muslin, exquisitely workedwith delicately crimped sleeves and gold buttons, which toned down the gaudiness of the silk and yet added to its richness. A pair of light cashmere shawls were thrown over his shoulders, and in his hand he carried an embroidered *rumāl* or handkerchief. His hair was oiled and curled and surmounted by a cap of green velvet and gold, and as he advanced with a dignified air into the room, he filled it with an aroma of musk and attar of roses.

Beside him waddled his father, looking very uncomfortable in his holiday suit of stiff green velvet and new unwashed muslin, but brimming over with smiles and self-gratulation at the noble presence of his favoured son.

The meeting between the Munshi and his father's elder brother, was cordial and affectionate, and even deferential on the part of the younger man, and then after the other guests had been saluted in detail, the host led the way into an inner room where dinner was prepared, not as is cus-

tomary with Europeans, but laid on a carpet on the floor. The guests sat down against the wall, with crossed legs, whilst attendants brought round a basin and ewer of rose-scented water for each visitor to wash his hands in turn. Another attendant with a silver syringe perfumed each guest with attar of roses, sending a fine shower of the diluted essence over his head.

Then they proceeded to lay down a snowy *dasterkhwan* and to arrange the dinner upon it.

This consisted of a greater variety of viands than what we have just described in the previous meal in the Hakīm's private room.

The various courses were put before each guest in separate little dishes, with all the necessary condiments and unleavened bread. The meats were varied and richly spiced. The *sālnā* (curries) and kabābs were especially commended, the pilaos were savory and the sweetmeats delicious—not the strong-smelling greasy compounds known to most of our countrymen as

native sweetmeats which are retailed to the lower orders, but the delicately rose-scented *barfi*, the crisp snowy *batasha*, made of purest sugar, the *Halwa solum*, the *Dar beyhisht*, soft cocoa-nut cakes and candied fruits, and as the satiated visitors toyed over the delicacies the conversation became more animated and free.

Whenever the Munshi spoke there was a general attention, for the words of one so learned and in such high favour with the government, commanded deference from all, except perhaps the host, whose opinion of his nephew was not quite so high as that of his fellow-townsmen. Perhaps the old man had a keener appreciation of character, as he was more independent in mind than his neighbours, and the official honours of the Munshi by no means blinded him to his shortcomings in many ways, and on the whole he did not envy his brother the possession of so talented and fortunate a son.

The Munshi's presence was to a certain extent a damper on the conversation, and the guests were careful how they expressed

themselves on any subject bordering on politics, although the times were stirring, the air full of rumours, and men's minds preoccupied with a sense of impending dangers. His position as an official of an alien government made him an object of distrust as well as envy.

"Take care, brother," whispered, with a glance at the Munshi, one of the guests to his neighbour who trenched somewhat incautiously upon dangerous ground. "Take care; what ox rings his collar-bell in the tiger's face?"

"Ullāh Kerīm! it is true, O friend," replied the other with a grimace; "he who is reared by the wolf will howl when he sings, and the deer that is fed on *adula* will have bitter meat. But I'll just put a question to him. Deputy Sahib, have you heard the cause assigned for the discontent amongst the forces at Achānak (Barrackpore)?"

The speaker was a shrewd-looking man of Moghul type, fair complexioned, that is, fair complexioned for a native, or what is usually termed "wheat-coloured," with

beetling brows and black beard, a man of decided and independent views, a radical in politics, and a speculator who had amassed considerable wealth, especially in government contracts, one of which, the supplying of mail horses for a section of the "Grand Trunk Road," was a source of no small profit to him. Therefore his opinion carried weight with his neighbours, and in the party there assembled he might be reckoned as second in importance to the Munshi.

"You mean the cartridge business, Darogah Sahib? Those sepoys are just a set of asses to suppose that the Government have any intention to interfere with their religion—such is the rumour which I by chance have heard; though it is possible your mail riders may have brought you more news,—but what good would it do the Sirkar to break all their castes? Do you think they care two straws what a man's religion is? The missionaries do perhaps, but then they are *Khafghān saré ka log* (half-witted sort of folk). The Government is atheistical—it has no religion;

what do you care whether one horse eats oats and another peas, so long as both do their work? so is the Government; do you work and go to the devil your own way, say they. They are too powerful to be afraid—some people now-a-days doubt it, and disbelieve that they have gained any victories over the Russ. My brothers, I know something about the Government, (here a hum of admiring acquiescence ran round the guests.) I ought to know something about the Government, and I know you can't hide the moon with a handful of dust, if any one thinks he can gain any advantage by trying to thwart the Sirkar, he is an idiot." "As the horse runs, so the saddle must follow," remarked the Darogah aside to his friend.

"So long as a government acts justly towards all creeds and nationalities under its protection, and interferes not with the religious views of its subjects that government is entitled to the confidence and loyal support of all. Such was the government of the great Emperor Akbar, and such is the Government of the English."

The speaker was the host, and the few words he said on the subject carried the greatest weight to the minds of the hearers, for they knew the simple uprightness of the man, and that he would not give utterance to what he did not feel in his heart, and, therefore, the universal assent of "Such hai, Sahib (It is true, sir)," which ran round the circle, was for the moment genuine, whereas in spite of the apparent deference paid to the Munshi, there was a lurking disposition towards sarcastic criticism, especially on the part of the Darogah, who soon returned to the attack.

"I hear it said, Allah knows if it be true, that Munshi Azim-ullah, who has just returned from England, saw the English forces before the Russian fort, and that bare-backed and bare-footed they lay in the snow dying by hundreds, and yet soon after we had salutes from the Calcutta fort for a great victory. What are we to believe?"

"Believe what you are told, Darogah Sahib, by the guns, lest they speak,—which God forbid,—with tongues of iron

and lead. Bah! who is Munshi Azim-ullah that he should set himself up as an authority on wars.

"The deputy Sahib can read all the European papers, and therefore should know more about the matter," remarked a sycophantic little man, who sitting next to the Munshi nodded applause at every trivial remark that fell from the great man, but the Darogah gave him a withering glance of contempt as he growled *sotto voce*,—

"Ay, ay, as the big bell booms, so will the bran-pot vibrate."

"There must be great friendship between the Queen of England and the Sultan of Roum for her to have helped him against the Russians," remarked the Mahafiz Dufter.

"Why!" burst in the impetuous Darogah, "the Queen of England was just ordered by the sultan to help. Is she not his vassal and holds her title by a Firman, otherwise, why should Christians war with Christians. Dog won't eat dog, every blind man can see that."

Here the Munshi could no longer contain himself, but burst forth into an immoderate fit of laughter, which made the last speaker glower at him with mingled anger and astonishment.

"What's the matter with you, Sahib," he growled, "has a fishbone stuck in your throat? here, eat a jettebi and take a drink of water."

The Munshi composing himself, wiped his eyes with his scented handkerchief, and replied,—

"Oh friends! excuse me that I could not restrain from laughing, but the Darogah Sahib's notions amused me, and remind me somewhat of the saying of the wise man, who was questioned concerning the foot-print of an elephant. 'May not an antelope with a mill-stone tied to its feet have bounded here?' He accepts as a fact a conclusion formed on a supposition, and a supposition about as probable as my simile; had the Darogah Sahib put the case the other way, and supposed the Sultan of Roum to be the vassal of the English queen, he would have been

nearer the mark, though still wide of the truth. Both the countries are in fact independent, and of the two, England is far the richer, and more powerful, and the bond of union between the two countries is a common hatred of the Russ, for, as I said to you before, the English government has no religion, and cares not whether you be faithful or infidel—Muslim or Chinese."

"So long as they can make money out of you," interposed the Darogah. "And you don't let your wheels creak as they go round."

"Darogah Sahib, you are a *mufsid* (a rebel)," laughingly rejoined the Munshi. "Take care I do not have you up before me in court some day."

"Astagfurullah!" snorted the other, and the host, thinking the discussion was bordering on dangerous ground, suggested that the company should retire to the other room, where coffee was awaiting them.

Here, after an hour's conversation on general topics, the deputy or senior guest asked permission to take leave, and his example was followed by the others.

When the last Us-Salām-u'-alekam had been uttered and the last guest disappeared in the gloom of the unlighted road, the Hakīm bethought him of his traveller, whom he had left in his private room; but what was his astonishment on proceeding thither to find the chamber vacant. He called his grandson, but the youth had not seen or heard aught, nor had any of the servants made mention of the departure of the stranger from the house. One thing only was certain the stranger was gone, and Allah only knew whether he was coming back or not—with which reflection the bewildered physician betook himself to his bed.

CHAPTER V.

We left the stranger fast asleep when our chapter closed, he had thrown himself down on the ground and had dropped off in a deep slumber, in a manner which is only attainable by the practice of the camp in the field. The soldier off duty, and the sailor when his watch is over, have the faculty for getting snatches of sleep at a moment's notice, which is denied to most other mortals, and a blessed gift it is.

The stranger's head had hardly touched the bolster which he placed as a pillow, when his deep snoring reverberated almost to the innermost recesses of the Zenana where the Hakīm's venerable spouse was superintending the preparation of the delicacies for the evening's feast.

Azīza Beebee was a worthy help-mate for her husband, a plump, soft-faced, sil-

very haired, active little body, with as large a heart for the grief and ailments of her neighbours as had the worthy Hakīm, who was wont to observe that she equalled Fatimatur Zohura, the daughter of the Prophet, who, as it is recorded, gave away to the poor on three successive days the food she had prepared, and passed the nights fasting. It was perhaps fortunate for Sheikh Rehmat-ullah that he had so complaisant a spouse, for with a termagant and thrifty wife he might not have been able to exercise that self-denying charity in which he emulated the first four Khalifs.

The other members of the Hakīm's Zenana were limited to two persons, a distant relation of Azīza Beebee's, whose entertainment as a *help*—she was far too independent in mind and action to be considered a servant—was the greatest act of charity and self-denial the benevolent couple had ever performed, for Amīrun was a perpetual thorn in their side, a cross-grained, grumbling, vinegar-faced old crone, who took every act of grace as a right, and

never had a word of thanks for anything, or anybody.

She was a widow, and as her husband, who was a sergeant in a regiment of native cavalry, had been killed in action, she had a small pension from the English Government, which, though quite insufficient for her entire maintenance as comprised in food and clothing, yet gave her a notion of independence of which she magnified the importance, and regulated her attitude accordingly. In fact, the old woman was quite under the delusion that she was conferring a favour on the relatives who gave her shelter, by continuing under their roof and helping in the daily tasks of the household.

The third female member of the family was a fair girl of about fourteen years of age. She was of the highest type of Mahomedan beauty, a Syedani of pure blood; there was the fair skin like that of the Cashmiri, with the rich carmine mantling beneath it, the large lustrous antelope eyes with their delicately pencilled brows, the slightly aquiline nose, and well-

turned mouth, and even teeth, all set in a face of perfect oval.

Fazilla Shah was just passing from girlhood into the more decided beauty of the woman, although judged by an English standard she was yet a child, but in the east as the bud developes more rapidly into the flower and falls faded to the ground sooner than the blossom of the more temperate zones, so the human race is earlier perfected, to age more speedily. Eleven years before, when the annexation of the Punjab put an end to the religious war between the Wahabis and the Sikhs, the leaders of the former with most of their followers returned to their homes in various parts of India; Sheikh Rehmat-ullah was then at the court of his patron in the north-west provinces, and to his door came one day a wayworn and fainting woman with a little child, and begged for food and relief from the fever that was devouring her. The large-hearted Hakīm and his wife took in the poor stranger, who in spite of age and the ravages of disease showed traces of great beauty, which

promised to be repeated in her little girl; they clothed and fed her, and did all that the native pharmacopœia would admit of, for her restoration, but in vain; she sank under her sufferings, and died, blessing them for their charity to her and for their promise to adopt her child.

Her husband had been a leader in the Holy Camp, and had fallen in a fray; she herself had lost all in losing him, for she had deserted her family, a family of noble Syeds, for him, a Wahabi and an alien, and now all she could do was to try and find out her relations, to whose care she might confide her only child; but she had not stamina enough for the journey, stricken with fever and deprived by want of sufficient means of the food necessary to keep up her strength. She struggled on as far as the town where the Hakīm lived, where she shivered for a a whole day in the Serai with the ague that racked her bones, and then a good-natured woman who had tried to relieve her, suggested that she should go to the Nawab's physician, a man of great skill,

generous as Haiun Tai, and charitable as His Excellency Ali-un-Murtuza, the son-in-law of the Prophet, and volunteered to show her the house. There the poor wayfarer found rest and peace, and an asylum for her orphan.

For two years Fazilla was the only care of the aged couple, but at the end of that time their family circle was increased by the advent of their grandson Abdul Rahīm, a boy of nine years of age, whose father, the Hakīm's only son, had died from the effects of an accident, and was soon followed to the grave by his wife. The two children were thus thrown together from an early age, and were in accordance with Mahomedan custom betrothed.

Abdul Rahīm was a quiet, studious boy, grave perhaps beyond his years and fonder of books than play, though if his juvenile comrades ever stirred him up to come out for a game at romps, none could exceed him in energy and daring.

A favourite game amongst Indian boys is that of "*Kabaddi*," which is very like "Prisoner's base."

The boys divide themselves into two parties and range themselves on either side of a line drawn on the ground between them. Alternately from each side one advances to the attack shouting "*Kabaddi! Kabaddi!*" and endeavours to touch one of his opponents without being seized, on which, if he succeeds, the boy so touched is supposed to be slain and lost to his party, but if the assailant be captured he retires from his side, and the contest is continued till all the members of one division are put *hors de combat.* Abdul Rahīm was one of the most agile at this game, and few of his age could excel him at the *Mugdar* or dumb-bells, which are a favourite exercise of Indian youth; yet he required rousing to take part in such sports; if left to himself he would remain in some corner with his books, apparently indolent, but not so really, for his brain was working with an intensity that none were aware of, none perhaps but Fazilla, for she was his only confidant; to her he confided his doubts and perplexities, to her clear judgment he appealed for aid, when

the obscurity of certain passages baffled him, for he was one of those minds who will by persistence get to the bottom of everything that excites a doubt, and she had the rarest gift of keen and almost intuitive perception.

As he was being educated so he educated her, for he made her a partner in his studies, and now at the age of fourteen Fazilla, unlike most girls of her nation, could read the Persian character and also the Roman type in English print, and was making some progress in the art of writing under the guidance of her betrothed.

We must now return to the stranger. He had slept about two hours when he woke as though he had timed himself to sleep for a certain period, and arose with the alacrity of one who had something to do at once, for he lost no time in girding himself. Binding on his turban, and taking his long staff in his hand, he quietly opened the door and walked out into the court-yard. The place was empty, as the servants were busily

engaged with the guests in the Diwan Khana, which was brilliantly lighted, and from whence he could hear the voices of the Darogha and the Munshi as they engrossed the conversation at dinner.

He passed out of the front door into the street, which was now deserted. The lights were out in the shops, and the forms of the owners could be seen rolled up in sheets like shrouded corpses, as they slept in the verandahs.

The night was dark, save for the glimmer of the stars, which in the clear skies of the East have an appreciable influence. Still there was not light enough by which to distinguish a man's features or even his dress. So he felt secure from unwelcome notice.

He found a few hundred yards from the door a large *baoli* or well, with a flight of stone steps leading to the water, and he sat down on the low surrounding wall.

Years had elapsed since he had last passed down that very street; years of ad-

venture, of toil, danger, and disappointment, and there he sat, the goal not yet reached, the stroke not home, the lofty aspirations humbled, ay, even to the dust. Bitterly had he cast aside the sword, and turned from the men he had hoped to lead to victory. The cry had gone forth, "To your tents, O Israel!" and he was left alone. At times he wished that the martyr's lot had been his, that he had fallen on the battle-field, even that had been denied him. He had lost blood and wealth, and wife and child in the cause, and what had been his reward? Had he not then taken the oath, dedicating himself to the martyr's death and crown? was he not a Ghazi, sworn to fight for the faith, living but for that, longing but for the opportunity? Perhaps it was coming, "Ya Allah!" he exclaimed, casting his eyes upwards, as bitter thoughts ran through his brain and heaved his breast, "Ya Allah! thou knowest, guide me in the right way, and not of those who go astray."

The air was full of rumours, the land was unsettled. The faithful were domi-

neered over by an alien race. The sword had been unsheathed at last, and there were not wanting those who loudly proclaimed that the time for the Muslim to awake from his helotism had come, and that he who hesitated was a renegade to his faith and people.

There was no one more ready to spring to the defence of the Holy Standard than the dark-browed, earnest man before us. Had not his whole life since manhood been devoted to the cause. Had he not studied his scriptures deeply, and been dignified by the coveted title of Moulvi? Had he not mourned over the degeneracy of his own co-religionists, and striven might and main to establish a place where Islam, purged from the corruptions of modern innovators, might flourish as a beacon and an asylum to the Faithful of the world?

But the dream had been dispelled, the sword, long wielded in vain, had at last been hurled with a solemn imprecation into the foaming waters of the Sutlej, as he left for ever the fair land of the Punjab;

and yet now once again the trumpet sounds to battle!

The fire still burned in his bosom, life had no enjoyment for him, the glories of Paradise promised to the martyr held out more inducement than he could hope for on earth. Had wife and child been alive, perhaps they might have influenced him; but he was alone. Therefore he snorted as the war-horse at the news of troubled times, and yet he was not prepared to draw the sword without the prize. The prize was martyrdom, but it was necessary that certain conditions should be fulfilled before the martyr's reward could be his.

Here approaching footsteps made him look up, and he perceived the glimmering of a lantern borne by a man who, coming up the street at a jaunty pace, carolled forth from lusty lungs a love ditty from the banks of the Goomti.

The stranger withdrew into the shadow of the gateway of the *baoli*, and watched. As the singer came near, the light of his lantern flashed on the bright brass badge

of a Government orderly and lit up the face of an unmistakable Oude *latthial*—a good-natured, but somewhat vacant countenance with a big mouth and a row of white teeth, firm, hard, and even as a granite coping. With his head well thrown back, and wagging in unison with the prolonged howls of a very lugubrious plaint, regarding the impossibility of his being able to do anything whatsoever, whilst his heart was so bedevilled by the wiles of the fair one, he came striding along with his chest well thrown out, in the swagger affected by his countrymen, when suddenly he came to a dead stop with mouth agape as a gaunt figure stepped out of the shade and confronted him.

"Arré Ram! who are you, Sahib?" he ejaculated as soon as his surprise would allow of speech.

"A friend, brother; but you are the deputy magistrate Munshi Karīm-ullah Sahib's orderly, are you not?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Well, then, I am a friend of his, and have some business with him of importance;

see,—as he comes out of the Hakīm Sahib's house give him this note. And here, brother, buy thyself sweetmeats with this."

"Very good, am I to mention any name to the Deputy, Sahib?"

"What have I written in that paper? Give that to him—it is enough—go!"

So saying, the stranger abruptly turned on his heel, whilst the peon, staring at him with open mouth for a minute, suddenly collected himself, and calling out, "Very good; salaam, Sahib," strode on, slinging the lantern on the end of his staff over his shoulder, catching the end under his chin, whilst he unwound a corner of his waist-cloth, and in it carefully tied up the coin which he had received from the stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

When Munshi Karīm-ullah came out from the Hakim's house the peon handed him the note, and held up his lantern by which his master might read it. He was not a man of very keen penetration, this Oude *latthial*, but still he could not help observing that the Munshi's brows somewhat contracted as he read the few words that were visible on the paper which the Deputy, knowing his follower to be illiterate, held close to the light.

However, Karīm-ullah said nothing, but rejoining his father, walked on in silence.

They had not far to go before they came to their house, and father and son, after saying good night, turned off to their respective apartments.

The Munshi, on reaching his room, hastily took down a dark-coloured camel-hair *choga* or robe, which he put on over his fine

clothes, and putting a pistol in the *cummer-band*, or shawl wrapped round his waist, passed silently out of the door, and casting a hurried glance around to see that he was not observed, he slipped out and hastily took his way up the road towards the Hakim's *bari*.

As he neared the well he stopped, and coughed slightly, whereupon the tall figure of the traveller stepped forth from the gloom of the gateway and greeted his visitant with a deep low "*us salām u' alekām*," to which the Munshi replied in the usual form.

The stranger advanced, and held out his hand, which Karīm-ullah cordially pressed.

"The Haji Sahib has travelled far to visit so unworthy a slave as myself," he said in true oriental self-abasement.

"The fame of Munshi Karīm-ullah Sahib is known from Lunka[1] to Peshawur; he can read the hearts as well as the books of the infidels, besides being learned in the sacred laws of the Faithful." Had it been

[1] Ceylon.

light, a sarcastic curl of the stranger's lips might have been seen as he uttered these words, but he continued, "The leaders of the North value the friendship of the Munshi Sahib even as do the Feringhi rulers of the land; he was born under a fortunate conjunction of the planets, what wonder then that I have travelled far to see him!"

"In what way can I help the Haji Sahib? and why comest thou thus secretly to me when the house of thy slave is thine and all that is in it?"

"Because it is not good for me and for thee to be seen of men together."

The Munshi felt this to be true, and mentally put down the stranger as a sensible man, for though he made the usual profuse offers of his house and property, he knew that it would not do for him to associate openly with men of doubtful loyalty to the state; he therefore felt relieved, and it was with additional satisfaction he heard that the traveller was housed by the Hakīm, for his uncle's hospitality to all strangers was so well

known that the Haji's presence there would excite little or no comment.

The stranger continued,—

"If it will not fatigue you, Munshi Sahib, I should like to take advantage of such time as we have to spare, and recount at once all that I have to say."

He had a most unoriental manner of coming to the point, this rugged wanderer. Easterns have a way of generalizing on topics, and only bring in the chief object of their wishes at the very last, but here he went plunging *in medias res*, in, as we have said, a most unoriental manner.

The Munshi smiled as he suggested that they should sit down on the parapet of the well.

Having done so, the Haji continued,—

"Moulavi Ismail hath certified to me that you have been a friend to our holy cause"—(Karīm-ullah smiled again; there was one sentence which he had gained from the Christian Scriptures, and which he had adopted as his motto, and that was being "All things to all men;" to the Wahabis, of whom his uncle was

one, of course he was a great friend)—"therefore I have come to open my heart to thee. Lo! these many years have I fought for the holy cause against the infidel dogs of the Five Waters; my blood has been shed, my means spent, my life in the last battle almost lost, for I lay covered with wounds amongst the slain. I rose from my bed to find my friends dispersed and my loved ones dead. Left alone in the world, I swore to die for the faith. I took the vows and became a Ghazi. My intention was once more to return to Mecca, and from thence to penetrate into Nejed, where, under the chiefs of my religion, I might gain the martyr's crown, as the constitutions do not admit of it in this land any longer; but there are rumours abroad that the rulers of the land are departing from their faith and conduct towards Moslem and Hindu alike, and are seeking by vile and underhand means to defile all who are not of their own religion. If this be true, they sin against Islam, and a *jihad* against them would be lawful. Already are the Ghazis of the north whet-

ting their swords, but I join them not till I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, evidence of such baseness as is laid to their charge; for the man who draws sword against a protecting power is damned and not saved, and why should I risk the great reward held out to the martyr for his faith? Moulavi Ismail and Moulvi Mahbub Ali have told me the conditions do not exist, and a war against the British would be sinful; but they are but men, and their knowledge is limited. Who knows the secrets of hearts but Allah? and in a matter of life eternal a man must act and think for himself; therefore I said, I know nothing of these Feringhis. I have passed my life warring on the frontier, I will go among them and see for myself what manner of men they are, and then if there be aught of baseness in them, I will strike, and fear not for any earthly punishment. I will be a spy in their camp; if so be I can take service with them I will do so, and for this end have I come to thee, Munshi Karīm-ullah, for help, knowing thee to be favourable to our cause."

"I hope this blunder-headed old visionary does not know how far I am concerned in his cause," thought the Munshi, as with knitted brows he pondered whilst his companion spoke. "Surely Hyder Ali is too discreet to let this old fanatic into any of our secrets. However, I must humour the old fellow a bit, and if I find he is likely to be dangerous, I know how to dispose of him.

"Haji Sahib, you are a man of great originality; how can I help you?"

"Well, Munshi Sahib, in this way. You have friends amongst the great English Sahibs, can you get me the appointment of servant to one of them?"

"Humph! that would be rather difficult. You see I must not appear to be in any way interested in you; and again, Haji Sahib, your appearance and manner are too lofty for menial service."

This was a delicate way of expressing what passed in the Munshi's mind; who on earth would take this uncouth old firebrand into his house?

"Never mind that," replied the stranger; "think well how you can manage it."

"Perdition seize this obstinate creature!" thought Karīm-ullah; "but I must do something for him, for who knows how much he may be in our plans; and his introduction is from one who is not to be slighted.

"Well, Haji Sahib," he added aloud, "I have one idea in my head—the magistrate of my district has a brother who is a judge at Amānpur, and to my knowledge the latter wrote to my friend, asking him to send him a good orderly chupprassee, as he wishes to fill up a vacancy by a man who is totally unconnected with the people of the district, there being a sort of family clique there, so I will give you a letter purporting to be a certificate of your services rendered in a similar capacity to a gentleman in the North-west Provinces, which may get you the situation. But you know, Haji Sahib, you will have a difficult part to play, the Sahib logue exact a great deal of deference, and they are very overbearing at times in their manners to inferiors."

"I want to see them as they are," replied the other shortly; "and I shall be careful; I have acted as a spy before, and have lived and learnt in the enemy's camp."

"Very well, Haji Sahib; to-morrow I will send you the note enclosed in one to my uncle, also a suit of clothes such as is usually worn by orderlies, and then you must go to the magistrate of Dukhinabad, and present the petition which I will also write out for you; and may Allah prosper your endeavours! Your duties as an orderly chupprassee will not be very heavy, and possibly if the Sahib is a married man, —all Feringhis are not, you must know— you may be set to nurse the baby, which a grim old warrior like yourself may find rather undignified."

But the old Haji merely replied curtly, "Allah will make all things easy," and his heart swelled as he thought of the time when he had babes of his own to dandle on his knees.

The conference over, they parted, and each returned to his room unseen.

The Munshi had some official documents in the handwriting of an English officer in the Punjab, a peculiar, cramped hand, easy to imitate, and as the writer had recently died, the clever but unscrupulous Deputy forged a certificate to this effect:—

"The bearer, Shere Ali, though a rough diamond, has served me faithfully and well for several years, and I can honestly recommend him as a good and trustworthy follower.

(Signed) "H. C. CARAPAX,
"Deputy Commissioner.

"Zillah Tukraree,
"*January*, 1857."

This, with a vernacular petition and a suit of clothes, he next day sent to the Haji.

CHAPTER VII.

We must now go back a year, and transfer the reader from the burning heat of the Gangetic valley to the verdant banks of the Arno, in Florence the beautiful.

We must ask him to go with us into the city, into a small room about twelve feet square, with a bare floor made of that marble-like composition common in Italy, and sparely furnished with a square bit of drugget, and easy armchair and two common ones; a deal table with drawers stands in one corner, in another is a large lump of greyish clay, modelling tools are lying about, and on a rude wooden stand is the half-finished model of a graceful statuette.

In another corner is a plaster fragment of the Medici Venus with a few folds of drapery across her shoulders; she has been acting the part of a lay figure. Another

fragment of the Niobe, sundry arms, hands, and feet in plaster lie scattered about: roughly dashed off sketches adorn the walls; one is a Roman peasant girl, with wild flashing eyes and compressed lips; another is a soft fair-haired Florentine, and there are sundry studies of grouping and colour from the galleries of the Uffizi and Pitti. In the centre of the room stands an easel with an unfinished picture on it; beyond it, in the recess of the window, is a flower-pot with a camellia-tree in the full pride of its matchless blossom; and out in the square below stands forth, in the bold chiaroscuro effect of the setting sun, the noble statue of Dante. The square in which this unpretending little studio is situated is the Piazza Santa Croce. In yonder church lies the hallowed dust of Michael Angelo.

Numero —, Piazza Santa Croce, is a small house of three low stories, the front door fastening with a spring-latch, to which a wire was attached leading through each floor, the occupants of which, after hearing a ring, could look out of the window and satisfy themselves that a friend was there,

and then, instead of sustaining a high-pitched colloquy, as in suspicious cases, or a duet in alto between the thrifty housewife and the itinerant dealer in crockery or greens, the wire could be pulled and the door opened without the person called upon having to descend to the ground-floor. As a rule Italians are not given to unnecessary labour.

Such a ring was given about six o'clock one evening in April, 1856, at least three heads were protruded from the various stages with the customary "chee," with the immediate self-response, "Oh, it's only Signor Cardoni." The wire in the second floor was pulled and Signor Cardoni found himself in a little bare vestibule, with tiled floor and bare walls, not a chair, not even a trestle or a hat-peg. Evidently neutral ground, however; as he had been through it a hundred times before, he did not stay to notice the poverty of the land, but proceeded to stumble up a little narrow tortuous stair which led to the upper regions of the tenement.

At the first landing there were three

doors, and as he was about to tap on the one to his right it opened, and a man of about thirty stretched out his right hand, the left being occupied by a palette, a maulstick, and a handful of brushes, exclaiming at the same time in Italian, but with a foreign accent,—

"Ah, my friend! How are you this evening?"

"Pretty well," replied the old man, "that is to say this accursed rheumatism still keeps hold of my left shoulder, but it might be worse—it might be worse."

"Ah, you always look at the bright side of things, my good friend," rejoined the Englishman, for such he was, leading the old Italian into the little studio we have just described.

"You always look at the bright side of things. I wish to heaven I could get some of the roseate tints of your mind to cheer me up a bit. My thoughts are always sketched out in dirty burnt umber and lamp black, or as we say in English—'in the blues'—and if I do get hold of a bit of rose, a smut is sure to fall on it and

ruin the tint,—but *basta!* what's the use of talking? Sit you down there, my dear old friend, in that easy chair; you look tired and worn, you work too much, and those cold galleries of the Uffizi are enough to give an alligator the rheumatics. Come, let me give you a glass of Vermouth."

"Nay, nay, I have just finished my dinner, and we Italians are not strong-headed at a glass now and then, as you Englishmen are. When I was in London some years ago I used to wonder how you could stand it; but come, let me see what you have been doing; you know I am standing in some sort Godfather to you in your artistic career, and so I must take an interest in your progress."

The younger man blushed as the other turned the easel, and slewed it round so as to bring the light more on the picture.

It was that of a fair, slender, auburn-haired girl in a rich crimson velvet dress, resting her cheek in a pensive attitude against her hands, which were clasped on the back of an old oak chair, at her feet on a stool was an illuminated folio of Dante,

the page open at the moan of the ill-fated Francesca de Rimini, which the old artist had chosen for the exercise of his skill, for the whole page of the parchment was taken up with that pitiful wail—

> Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi
> Del tempo felice nella miseria.

The amount of colour in the picture was striking, a rich blue velvet cloak lined with ermine thrown carelessly over a chair in one corner, the variegated light from a painted window falling on the dark floor, a dark curtain and background of tapestry relieved by a white marble pillar.

The elder artist looked at it some time in silence.

"Cospetto!" he at last exclaimed, drawing a long breath. "It is a bold attempt, my friend; you will do that picture again ten years hence, and you will do it justice."

"Ah! ten years hence," replied the other with an expression half cynical, half sad. "If ever I am able to paint in that time."

"Che! che!" impatiently ejaculated Signor Cardoni. "What is that you are saying? Of course you will paint in ten years' time, and make a name too, if you only go on as sedulously as you do now; but," continued the old man, shaking his head, "you ought to be poor, you are rich, that is to say rich in an Italian's eye, with your eight hundred pounds a year. Cospetto! my old patron Count Rubino had only seven hundred in the grand duke's time, and yet he had his palazzo and carriage, and kept open house; but "tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis," which is about all the Latin I remember. I was brought up for a lawyer, you must know, but somehow the love of art ousted the promptings of prudence, and greatly against the wish of my family I became what I am—a copyist." The sadness with which the last sentence was uttered made the Englishman clap his hand on the old man's shoulder, and exclaim, "Ah! and the best copyist in Italy; where is the hand that can reproduce the glowing flesh-tints of Titian, the lovely face of Guercino's

Sibyl, the different styles of Rubens, Vandyke, and Carlo Dolci so faithfully as Luigi Cardoni, with all the mellowness of the originals and not like those horrible raw monstrosities which are bought up right and left by my countrymen and perpetuated in their cockney villas as the masterpieces of ancient art?"

Old Cardoni looked at his usually cynical young companion, thus roused to enthusaism, with a half-pleased half-deprecating expression. "Piano—piano—caro mio—it is true I have some skill in reproducing, but I was driven to it. When I was your age my heart was full of ambition. I would paint originals which would take the world by storm. I felt I had it in me. My friends sneered at me for not following my father's lucrative profession. I would show them how the full blooded race-horse would outstrip the drudge in the market-cart. But bitter disappointments came, some of my originals still remain unsold. I did what every foolish young man without money does, I married. Then I had sense enough to see that I

must give up trying for a visionary crown, and bring bread to my young wife by the sweat of my brow. I became what I am —a copyist—but still I had my ambition, so long as your countrymen and the Americans came with their full purses, copying was profitable, and I would be the best of all copyists. I worked and slaved at tints, I went over my ground again and again; my friends applauded and cried 'Bravo!' but I was not satisfied. There was the rich mellow original, and here my crude glaring caricature; disappointed but not disheartened, I set to work again, and at last success came. Even crowned heads became my patrons as the name of Cardoni got known, and the result of my labours has provided me with that neat little villa, where I may some day end my life's journey under the shade of my own vines and mulberries."

"And may that day be far distant, Padrone mio—see, the sun is fast going down, let us go out, I am sick of this. Here I have been since seven this morning, and to what purpose? There is my rough idea,

good enough in its way, but the execution is vile, my fingers will not work out what I have in my brain. Verily there is no profit under the sun."

"Nay, say not so, my young friend; success will come with perseverance, I tell you," continued he, tapping the Englishman's broad forehead with one finger. "It is all there, the originality is there, you merely want practice and patience. You will paint that picture again in ten years, and people will acknowledge the master's hand."

"Perhaps," replied the other with an incredulous shrug, as he laid down his palette and brushes, and taking off his painting-coat replaced it by a better one, which he took from a cupboard.

Paul Stanford was not a handsome man, his face was not one that a painter would be struck by—not like old Cardoni's fine profile and deep-set eyes. It was a very ordinary English face, with rather irregular features, big forehead, earnest grey eyes, and a large well-formed mouth, which when the somewhat habitual cynical ex-

pression gave way to a hearty smile, disclosed a firm row of white teeth. He was not on the whole a bad-looking fellow, though he somewhat believed in his own opinion when he spoke of any one as "an ugly beggar like myself." He was firm-set and powerful in frame, a good walker and rider, and self-confident, though he had never been tried as yet in any position of peculiar peril.

Whilst his companion was making himself spruce, old Cardoni began looking about him at the other sketches which lay on the table or covered the walls. Suddenly he broke into an exclamation of wonder as he took up a small piece of canvas whereon was vigorously dashed off a head. It was that of an Oriental without doubt, though as much of the costume as was visible was European. It was of a man about thirty-five, of a dark olive complexion, aquiline nose, piercing eyes, thin lips slightly parted, but with a wolfish expression, as the white teeth gleamed through them; the light was well thrown on the head and on the forehead stood out a small serpentine

vein, near where the highest light was concentrated.

"Per Bacco! what a study! what a diavolo! but well done indeed, well done indeed. Caro mio, don't say again you cannot paint. But who is this? where did you pick him up? This is no creation of your own brain, I am sure. This must be a portrait."

"So it is, Signor Luigi, so it is; they say he is an Indian prince. I don't know anything about him, but from that expression on his face, I should say he is not an angelic tempered creature when roused, though as a rule he is as sweet as a Venetian caramel, and he seems to have lots of loose cash. I came across him in this way. He frequents the same café where I get my breakfast every morning, and from my usual corner I get a good view of the nabob without being noticed by him. I was struck at first by his snaky appearance, his way of gliding into the room, and the sharp glance of his eye, which seemed to take in everything that was going on. Twice I noticed that peculiar expression

which I have managed to hit off in this sketch, once when a careless waiter dropped some hot coffee on his jewelled fingers, and then again at something he read in a paper which he brought with him. This excited my curiosity, especially as I saw that it was *The Times*, so taking a glance at the date as I passed, I went to the library and looked up the paper, but there was nothing that I could see that would interest him, unless it were a leading article on the Treaty of Paris. However, it is the best portrait I have ever done, and is as like the man, as one pea is like another."

"He is a bad man whoever he may be," remarked the old painter, laying the canvas down. He must be a bad man with such an expression. I never saw the like before, but once, and that was in the case of a young brigand, who was shot some years ago down near La Cava. He was a perfect fiend for cruelty, and when I saw his dead body, the face had just such a sneer as you have depicted."

"Are you ready to go?" asked Paul, taking a stout stick from a corner.

"Si, si, andiamo."

And so they went out, turning the key of the studio door, and in two minutes more they were standing out in the Piazza, gazing at the beautiful façade of the Santa Croce church.

"I like that more and more every time I look at it," remarked the younger artist.

"Yes," replied the other, "it is a grand work of art, worthy of the mausoleum of the glorious departed; and we have to thank an Englishman for it."

"How so?"

"Why you see the work had to be done by subscription, which failed, and it had come to a standstill, when a generous countryman of yours who had spent many years of his life in Italy, came forward and completed the design, though it cost him thirteen thousand pounds of your money; it would never have been done but for that."

"Well, if he made his fortune in this country, as many of my nation have done, it was only right he should spend a part of his superfluous riches in the land of his adoption."

"Yes, yes, my friend, that is right enough in the abstract, but it is uncommon in practice, especially now-a-days, in Italy."

Cardoni, being now started on a favourite theme, pursued it, until the friends had reached the Porta Romana, when he came to a dead halt.

"Bacco! but it is warm, my worthy young friend, I have had enough; Luigi Cardoni's legs are his last, therefore I must cry hold, and this evening mist will do my rheumatism no good, so, as my house is close by, I will say good night, for I know you will not be satisfied with such a short walk, but you young Englishmen are wonderful fellows, out in the sun all day and in the malaria at night, but you must excuse an old fellow like myself, so good night, we shall meet again to-morrow."

"Nay, I'll walk down as far as your house with you, and then come back again," said Paul.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, unless you promise to come in."

"Thanks, but excuse me, I can't do that," replied the young man, hesitating and

blushing deeply—a tell-tale countenance had Paul Stanford; "that is, not to-night; some other day; my compliments to the Signora and to Signorina Teresa; tell her I have written to England for the seeds of the flowers she wants."

"Thanks, amico mio, I will tell her,—a rivederla!"

"Addio," rejoined Paul, giving him the usual hearty grip which old Cardoni used to say was like the force of a lemon-squeezer: "e vero, per Bacco!"

CHAPTER VIII.

STANFORD doubled his pace as he left the Porta Romana behind him, and turning up the avenue to the left, made for the Poggio Imperiale as the villa at the top of the hill is called. He had a habit whilst walking, and especially when in deep thought, of swinging his stick round and round, like the spoke of a cart-wheel, and to-night it was going more vigorously than ever. There were glorious effects of warm sky tints glinting through the overhanging trees, disputing with the moonbeams in adding to the charm of light and shade to the landscape; fire-flies were flitting about in myriads, the little weird sparks flashing in the gloomy depths of the foliage; but Paul's artist self had flown, he looked neither to right nor left, but strode on, whirling his stick round and round.

On a low wall near the villa we have mentioned sat a party of two ladies and a gentleman, all English. The elder of the two ladies was about forty years of age, stout and good-tempered looking; she was busily engaged in discussing a knotty point in Italian history with her neighbour, a tall, thin, very hooked-nosed man of about fifty-five, who seemed half-bored, half-amused, by the arguments and earnest pertinacity of his fair opponent. Miss Blatter was in her element, she was a woman not without some natural talent, but by whom the dictum that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing was perpetually exemplified; her brain was like a rag collector's bag, full of odds and ends, shinbones of history, knuckle-ends of theology, rags and tags of statistics, politics, and science. She was endowed with great physical endurance and much exuberance of spirits; therefore, she was about as undesirable a companion on a continental tour as it is possible to conceive, that is for poor mortals of ordinary tastes and capabilities, to whom quiet enjoyment is a luxury. Miss

Blatter was one who would see everything, hear everything, and expatiate on everything; she was like an old friend of ours, a dead snipe-shot, who when he came across a likely marshy bit, would not leave until he was certain he had knocked over every bird in it. So would it have been agony to Miss Blatter's soul, had she been told after she had left a place that there was something in it that she had not seen, though after all much of her inspection was after the fashion of an American traveller we know of, who did Rome in three days; rushing into the Colosseum, he threw a frantic glance around, and then running back to his carriage, he exclaimed, "Thank goodness, I've seen that now; driver, fire ahead!" She had made the acquaintance of Mr. Lufton and his daughter at Venice, and finding that he was an Indian civilian, immediately installed herself as a most intimate friend, almost a relative, for had she not a brother in the same service? They were travelling down leisurely to Brindisi, intending thence to ship to Alexandria after visiting the

principal towns en route, and so without any invitation on their part, Miss Blatter announced that she would bear them company, and then they could tell dear Joe that they had seen so much of his dear sister Rebecca. Mr. Lufton belonged to the Bengal Presidency and Mr. Blatter to Bombay, but that was all one to her, she never stooped to analyze such trivialities; they were both in India, that was quite enough; meet they must some day.

However, at the moment of which we write, Miss Blatter was in her element and her companion deserved the greatest credit for his outward demeanour, whatever his private opinion may have been of the contents of the rag-bag, as he bowed acquiescence to the lady's demonstrations that the Florentine commonwealth must have been the grandest form of government that ever was, or is, or is to be. She had mounted her hobby, having just read Trollope's book on the subject, had tried to get hold of the authorities quoted by him, and in the only instance where she succeeded, had failed to master the quaint old Italian, and

therefore deemed it quite unnecessary to pursue the subject any further, it was so clearly exponed by Trollope; and then she had read the life of Benevenuto Cellini and Ranke's Lives of the Popes, to say nothing of vague recollections of Pignotti's History of Tuscany, a book in three volumes calf, on the third shelf, left hand side of the book-case, in the small parlour of the house left her by a maternal grandfather, so of course she was up in her theme. Mr. Lufton mentally compared her to a stranded porpoise, but his deferential manner never relaxed for a moment, and the skilful way in which he prompted her in her history from time to time, and then allowed her to take the bit between her teeth and run away, showed the man of the world. He was bored, intensely so, and had been so day after day ever since Miss Blatter joined them, but his patience under these daily inflictions was most exemplary, and in the present instance his outward demeanour was such as would lead one to suppose that he was deriving valuable knowledge and original ideas from his companion.

So Miss Blatter was the happiest of the three.

The third was a girl of about seventeen, who whilst her father and friend were busy discussing the past history of Tuscany, sat aloof and abstracted, drawing, in an absent manner, geometrical figures on the sandy road with the point of her parasol. As far as could be seen in the twilight, she was slight and graceful, with a small, beautifully rounded head and oval face, a mass of rich auburn hair, features slightly irregular and in that respect differing from the bold chiseled profile of her father, with a mobile expressive mouth and deep earnest large brown eyes.

The reader has no doubt at some time in his or her life come across, at some public assembly, at church, or a dinner party, a face not strictly beautiful, but with eyes that one could not keep one's own from till one was almost ashamed, and feared to be caught staring.

Such eyes had Grace Lufton, inherited from her mother, who had been a little pale, almost plain, woman, with eyes

that brought more than one wooer to her feet.

Grace had inherited also some of her father's good looks, but not his calm, imperturbable temper, for she was quick and hasty, though, like most warm and impulsive people, of a most loving nature; but Miss Blatter tried her sorely. She longed to have her father to herself, and to enjoy quietly all that was beautiful in Nature and art in the historic country she had from childhood longed to visit, and here was this wretched, pedantic, querulous old woman dogging their footsteps and marring their pleasure; it was really too bad to be borne! Then again she would reproach herself for her petulance, and find some saving clauses in the indictment against Miss Blatter—she was good-natured after all, and she might really be nice if only she lived a long way off and could be seen only now and then for a short time, but this daily communion was really too much of a good thing, and Grace almost longed for the steamer which should carry them away from the overpowering Rebecca.

Grace had just put the finishing stroke to a six-pointed star, when she heard a voice address her, and starting as she looked up, she held out her hand to Paul Stanford, whose footstep on the dusty road had been noiseless.

"Are you working out Euclid by the wayside?" asked Paul, seating himself beside her, as he noticed the two triangles of which the star was composed.

"I fear my knowledge of Euclid is limited," replied Grace; "but I have been in school for the last two hours"—she added with a sly glance at Miss Blatter.

"Ah! I see. Miss B. improving the occasion—what's the text to-night?"

"The history of the Florentine Commonwealth."

"That is easily summed up in a few words. Battle, murder, and sudden death."

"Miss Blatter however seems to approve of it."

"That is because she lives in peaceful times, and has no chance of putting her head on a block or being frizzled at a stake for her opinions."

"Poor old Miss Blatter! fancy her tied to a stake in the Piazza della Signoria!"

"She'd make a grand *auto da fé*."

"Oh! Mr. Stanford!"

Miss Blatter caught the name, and suddenly leaving Savonarola to take care of himself, turned to the young man with an an exclamation.

"Mr. Stanford! is that you? Now you're the very man I want. You promised to show us your studio, you know you did, three weeks ago, at the picnic at Vallambrosa, and I have never been able to get hold of you since—now, when may we come, I say *we*, for I know Miss Lufton has been dying to go too."

Grace dug the point of her parasol in the sand, and exclaimed to herself "horrid old woman," but it was too dark for her blushes to be seen; her companion got up, and shaking hands with the others, apologized for not having done so before on the grounds that he did not wish to interrupt their interesting conversation, and concluded by saying that his studio was always open to them.

"Then we can pay you a visit to-morrow," replied Miss Blatter. "At what time?"

"At any time you like between ten o'clock and five."

"Oh, dear! I thought you artists limited your calling hours on account of your studies from the life—is not that what you do?"

"My rooms are always at the service of my friends," rejoined Paul, who in Grace Lufton's presence resented Miss Blatter's pleasantry; "and my models, whenever I have any, can bide their time; so come when it is convenient to you, though I fear you will regret the waste of time, which might be better employed."

"Ah! you artists always say that; but I have no doubt I shall find something to repay me. By-the-bye, you are a great friend of Signor Cardoni, could you find out for me what he would charge for a copy of a picture in the Uffizi Gallery by Sandro Botticelli?"

"What! the man who painted the snub-nosed virgins?"

"Mr. Stanford! you are a heretic. I

love Botticelli, and think his Madonnas are beautiful. Don't you think so, Mr. Lufton?"

"Well, no. I rather incline to Mr. Stanford's opinion, that they are snub-nosed. Possibly their nasal organs point in the right direction—heavenwards; but still they are vulgarly speaking snub-nosed, and, consequently, I do not much admire them."

"Well, I *do* admire them," insisted Miss Blatter; "and his boys' faces are heavenly."

"There I agree with you," said Mr. Lufton; "there is something angelic about their expressions, which compensates for a certain angularity and awkwardness in the general drawing—but I am not a lover of the pre-Raphaelite school, and cannot go into raptures over the monstrosities of Giotto and Cimabue, which are well enough for the rude days in which they lived, and are curious as showing the dawn of art, but are not to be compared with more modern productions; for my own part, I would rather have a gallery of modern paintings."

"Bravo, Mr. Lufton," cried Paul; "so much the better for us poor artists. All honour to the hallowed dust of our artistic forefathers, but I hope the world in general will agree with you."

"I am sure, Mr. Stanford," rejoined Miss Blatter, "that you cannot class yourself amongst the poor artists."

"Perhaps not, strictly speaking, Miss Blatter. My friend Cardoni often tells me that genius is only to be spurred by starvation, and therefore to rise beyond a mere dauber I ought to forswear my modest patrimony, but still I am an artist at heart, and feel for my brother artists, who win their bread more nobly."

Grace Lufton here called to mind the stories she had heard from Signor Cardoni, of whom she took lessons, of Paul's goodness to his poorer companions—there was Vanelli, whose pictures were now so sought after, a couple of years before he was hopelessly in the hands of the Jews, who got his marvellously finished works for a song, until Stanford paid his debts and gave him a fair start,—poor Tupper, the

English artist, with his sick wife and five children, were kept going in meat and milk by Paul, and there were numerous cases which the young Englishman would have blushed to be spoken to about, but which Cardoni was never tired of retailing, and the praise did not fall on inattentive ears. If Paul had only known the swelling of that little heart, as the old Italian dilated on his goodness and generosity—but there he was day after day in a cynical sort of way trying to persuade himself that she was quite indifferent to him. Because the girl did not throw herself into his arms, Paul argued that she must dislike him—which showed how little he knew the female heart.

The first time he met Grace it was with him a case of love at first sight—that silly thing he had always laughed at, and at times rallied his younger friends on—but it was so. He went to spend an evening with a friend at the hotel where the Luftons were staying, and as he walked up the salon he was shot through by a pair of lustrous eyes—from that time he was no

longer his own self. His friend had made the acquaintance of the Luftons, and he was introduced, and since then he had managed somehow to be, for a few minutes at all events, in Grace's society every day. But it was all vanity and vexation of spirit —what was the good of his bothering his head about her, and wasting his time in trying to paint those speaking eyes. She was not for him, and then the bare thought of any one else possessing her drove him frantic. Yet why should she marry him—an artist!—true he was deemed a rich artist in Italy; he had eight hundred a year of his own, enough for a bachelor, and up to the present time it had seemed ample for all his requirements, but now what a miserable pittance it appeared. How could he ask a girl to marry him—an unknown idler, on such a sum—he pictured to himself the father questioning him as to his means, and shaking his head over such an insufficient income. No, no, it would never do—and yet Miss Blatter called him a rich artist, and had he known the inmost recesses of Grace's heart, he

would never have given the question of the insufficiency of his means another thought.

The rich warbling of a nightingale in the trees close by now attracted the attention of the party, and as they listened silently, Paul resumed his seat beside Miss Lufton. Then they had a delightful walk home, Miss Blatter and Mr. Lufton leading, and the two young people following at a little distance. How short the way seemed; Paul felt quite savage at the porter of the Pension, when he let them in with alacrity.

"Now, mind, Mr. Stanford," said Miss Blatter, as she held out her hand to say good-night; "mind, we are coming to take you by storm to-morrow at three o'clock."

"All right, Miss Blatter; I'll have an old brigand or two to pose for you, and I will borrow one of my friend Vanelli's pictures to put on my easel, for I have really nothing worth looking at."

"Ah, we'll judge of that! good-night."

"Good-night, Miss Blatter; good-night, Mr. Lufton; good-night," in a lower tone,

and a long soft grasp of the little hand, and Paul turned away down the dark Via Maggio, his stick going round and round with greater rapidity than ever.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning Paul was at the studio betimes, greatly to Beppa's astonishment, for she did not expect him for at least two hours, and was somewhat put out in consequence, for her sweeping had not been accomplished. Beppa was lame and given to rheumatics; she consequently did not love exercise at too early an hour of the day.

"'Tissima 'donna! Signor Paolo, who expected you at this time of the morning? why I haven't had time to touch a thing yet and—"

"Never mind, Beppa mia, never mind. I'm not coming to work just yet; but I wanted to tell you to scour out the room well, for a party of English signori are coming to-day, and I want the place a bit tidy, and a new camellia-tree in the

window, so I am just going down to the nursery for one. And when you've done the room, just step round to Leonardo Vanni's and tell him as he goes out by the Porta San Gallo this morning, to look in at 'Nunziata's, and tell her I shall not want her to-day; she was to have come to sit for the angel in the picture the Signor Americano wants."

"Si-si, I'll tell him," replied the old woman, considerably mollified when she found she was not to be hurried more than usual; "a nice easy way of making money it is," she muttered to herself as she hobbled down the stairs, "a lira and a half an hour for sitting like a crow on a gate post. 'Stissima 'donna! but she's a good girl, is 'Nunziata, and doesn't forget that her mother was nursed through her last illness by me, and a lira and a half an hour for doing nothing, is better than ten soldi a day for stitching cloth boot-tops."

Such a clearing out that studio had; the whole morning Paul spent in arranging, and dis-arranging, and re-arranging; first one thing was rejected, and then another—

he really had nothing fit to be seen. What would she think of the hurried daubs he had, after the exquisite gems she must have seen in other studios? how could he call himself an artist? After all he was but little more than an amateur. He might be able to paint some day. Ah! some day! she might then be married, and she and her husband and children (he bit his moustaches at the thought) would come and see his success as they passed through Italy on their way from India. He felt inclined to pitch everything out of the window and go out of town—anywhere—,but that would never do, it wouldn't be civil.

However, after a time, the studio was arranged more to its master's satisfaction, and Paul, in spite of his being in love, felt hungry and adjourned to a trattoria in a street adjoining the great historical Piazza of Florence—the Piazza della Signoria, the trattoria della Luna, noted for its truly Italian cuisine.

The salon was full when he entered, but the waiter to whom Paul had addressed himself darted off into a side-room and

returned with the intelligence that there was space at one small table, at which there was a foreign gentleman who would have no objection to his joining him.

"What nationality?" asked Paul.

"I do not know, but I think he is an Egyptian," was the reply.

"Egyptian!" returned the Englishman, shrugging his shoulders, "Va bene—I will fraternize with the scion of the House of Pharaoh. But Pietro, mind you, no delay about that pollo, I have an important engagement, and no time to lose."

"Mi scusi, Signor—it is ready, you shall not be kept a minute—risotto à la Milanese —pollo—una frittata—vino? Pormino, si—formaggio? non!—frutta? non!—ebbene, this way, Signor Paolo."

Bowing as he took his seat at the vacant place pointed out by the waiter, Paul to his great astonishment found himself face to face with the Indian prince whose portrait he had so faithfully hit off on canvas.

The stranger half rose as he returned Paul's slight inclination, made a deeper

bow, and addressing him in perfect and fluent English said,—

"I believe I have the honour of meeting an English gentleman?"

"I have the honour of belonging to that nation," replied Paul, laughing, "and judging from your acquaintance with our language, you must be familiar with my countrymen."

"More so," answered the other, "than with the people around us."

"But you have many Italians in Egypt, —more Italians than Englishmen, I should think."

"In Egypt, possibly," rejoined the Oriental with a smile, which had a faint suspicion of a sneer in it, "but not in India, which is my country, that is, mine by birth, yours by possession, as the English are now our rulers."

"Ah! then you are Indian. I thought so, only the waiter here just now styled you a Signor Egiziano, so I thought he knew you."

The stranger laughed as he replied,—

"Ah! I suppose we're all Jews, Turks,

infidels, and heretics to the pious Catholics of this fair land."

Here Pietro made a diversion as he came up balancing several dishes in his hands, whilst he gripped a flask of wine under his arm.

"How well they cook asparagus here," remarked the Oriental as they resumed their conversation after a few seconds attack on the good fare set before them.

"Yes, the asparagus is good; but to my mind they never boil it enough."

"Well, I certainly have tasted it better in Paris, but on the whole I am not dissatisfied with Italian cookery."

"I suppose you prefer it to English; my countrymen are very solid feeders."

"I confess I do. Several of the Italian dishes are more familiar to an eastern palate than beef and turnips and cuts from huge joints—not that I dislike such living. After getting over my first astonishment, I took very kindly to your fare, but on the whole I prefer the Italian system, and that risotto which you are eating is not unlike our pilao."

"I confess I should like to taste some of your Oriental dishes of which one reads in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"I assure you some of them are not to be despised," replied the stranger, whilst a faint flash of his peculiar expression passed over his countenance as he added, "although our English rulers do affect to turn up their noses at them."

"But why?"

"Ah! why! because they are not English and nothing un-English can be good. Have you not seen with your own eyes, whilst living in this country, that the generality of Englishmen sneer at everything that is foreign to them. What they do not understand they condemn, and on that principle they act in India."

"But after all these years of what you must confess has been a tolerably just and fair rule, it is time that the English and the Indians should understand each other."

"My dear sir," replied the Oriental, and the words came gliding out of the gleaming teeth with a hissing sound like that of a snake, "after a century of rule the Eng-

lishman no more understands my people than the native understands the English. The one haughtily looks down upon the other, who cannot fathom the customs and mode of thought of the European, and whose superstitions and caste prejudices in most cases interpose a barrier between any familiar converse, even if such were encouraged."

"But surely, Englishmen there must be who desire to mix with the people of the country and to learn something of their habits; at least, it is so in most countries they go to."

"A few there are undoubtedly, but on the other hand there are others who are like an old gentleman now staying at my hotel, who in my presence one day, declared he had been forty years in India, and 'thank goodness,' he knew nothing of the language."

"I hope there are not many like him," said Paul.

"Too many, I fear," replied the other, "What do the majority care for the country, except to make what they can out of it,

and to retire with their gains? they have no sympathy with the people, and know little of their inner life; the best disposed amongst them are so hood-winked by clever and unscrupulous subordinates, that your boasted English justice is but a one-eyed affair."

"Well, but you give us credit for good intentions after all, and the relations between the rulers and ruled may improve in time."

"Perhaps," remarked the stranger, with his peculiar smile, "but I do not give you English credit for so much justice as you suppose, you make a great show of it in your law courts, and I believe conscientiously try to do right in small matters, a petty crime is a gnat to be strained at; but with what ease do you swallow a huge camel of faithlessness! It is the old story, necessity hath no law, it was necessary for your ambitious views to absorb state after state, province after province, vows were pledged and broken, solemn treaties made and set aside; like the coils of a huge Python, the British power enfolded tract after tract of the fairest country, and what

are we now, a nation of helots; the noblest prince among us subservient to the nod of any English stripling, who goes out à la Clive, to make his fortune out of the gorgeous East."

Paul looked at his companion, who, though he talked in measured and cynical tones, had the little serpentine vein standing out on his forehead, and an angry glitter in his dark eyes.

"Poor fellow," thought Paul, in his off-hand way, "no doubt he is one of those dispossessed princes, and feels sure on the subject."

The stranger also seemed to think he had gone far enough, and abruptly changed the conversation by asking the Englishman whether he had been long resident in Italy.

"About a year," answered Paul, "I came as a tourist and settled down as an artist."

"Ah! an artist! I am glad of that, I always breathe more freely when I am not in the presence of an English official, for to tell you the truth, I love not the Satrapy of the Indian services, especially the Civil,

and with the independant Britisher in his own or any other country save India, I feel more at home; I am frank with you, for I like you, little as I know of you, but I am a good physiognomist."

"I am sure, I am much obliged to you," replied Paul, thinking he could not return the compliment, "but how is it you are so thoroughly European, in your habits and manners? your English is faultless, and I notice that some of your expressions are quite scriptural."

"Ah," answered the other with a laugh, "you know it is said that somebody can quote Scripture to serve his own ends, but I may tell you that though a Mahomedan heart and soul, I have a knowledge of your scriptures, not only from a frequent perusal of them, but for purposes of comparison with our own revelation, for you must know that the sacred scriptures of the Jews and Christians, were intended for guidance until abrogated by the last, and as we think most perfect revelation, the holy Quran. However I am not going to enter on a theological discussion, suffice

it to say, my scriptural knowledge was in the first instance derived from an English missionary, who educated me as a boy, and, poor man, it is not his fault if he failed to convert me, and turn me from a noble Syed to a plain Ebenezer Smith; then I studied literature in a college near Calcutta, and since then have mixed a good deal with Englishmen, and even travelled and resided in your country, which is so fair a spot, that to me it is a wonder any native of it should care to leave it for the sultry tropics, especially as the once famed Pagoda-tree is not so easily shaken now."

"So you approve of England."

"Oh, yes, though for me my own land is best, but I enjoyed myself very much in England. I had the run of the best society and was made much of, particularly by the ladies, who were amazingly kind, so that I quite lost my heart amongst the houris of that dusty Paradise, London, and had at one time serious thoughts of taking to myself an English wife."

Here Paul's brows showed an inclination

to knit, as he mentally anathematized the Syed for his impudence, and when he thought of such a one aspiring to the hand of a girl like Grace Lufton, he felt very like pitching him out of the window. It was not because he was an Oriental, for Paul had not that prejudice against the Indians, of which his companion had accused his countrymen; he would have felt the same with respect to any foreigner who spoke lightly of allying himself with an English girl, for Paul was in love, and had at the time a very sacred and exalted idea of woman-kind, more especially English woman-kind, as typified by Grace Lufton, and therefore, he felt a little nettled, which, somehow did not escape the sharp eyes of the Indian, who went on to say—"However, it would not do, as saith one of our poets,—

> Like with like must wing its flight,
> Dove with dove and kite with kite;

so I banish the idea from my mind.

"I see you have dined, shall we stroll through the galleries together, if you have nothing better to do?"

"Thanks," replied Paul, taking his hat, "I am afraid I must deny myself the pleasure. I have an appointment at three o'clock, and I fear I have let time pass too rapidly in your company, for it wants only half-an-hour, and I have yet work to do."

"Well, I hope we shall meet again," replied the Syed, "you must dine with me some evening before I leave for India, and go to the Opera afterwards; when shall it be? say to-morrow."

"With great pleasure," answered Paul, who had some curiosity to see more of his new acquaintance.

"Dining at the hotel is stupid, so if you will call for me at six, we will adjourn to Doney's in the Via Tornabuoni, and then go to the Pergola."

"Va bene; au revoir."

"Au revoir," echoed the Oriental, heartily shaking hands, and so they went out, leaving Pietro standing agape at the friendship which Paul had struck up with the Signor Egiziano.

CHAPTER X.

"So here we are at last, Mr. Stanford!" exclaimed stout Miss Blatter, considerably out of breath, as she climbed the steep stairs and entered the little studio. "What a nice little room, so cheerful; and with that noble statue of Dante before you, inspiring your genius with his continual presence; and what a lovely camellia-tree in the window; really, Mr. Stanford, you must be a poet as well as a painter. Now, have you not a volume of sonnets stowed away in some secret hiding-place?"

"Not a sonnet, I'm afraid, Miss Blatter. I am sorry to lose your high opinion of my capabilities, but my Pegasus is no better than a donkey in a costermonger's barrow."

"Ah, that's what all you men say, when all the time you are secretly trying to out-

Tennyson Tennyson; but if we cannot get at the sonnets, let us look at the pictures. Those are very interesting studies," she continued turning to Mr. Lufton and pointing to the heads on the walls. "What force and vigour they display. See, here is a Roman, and I am sure that is a Caprese, is she not, Mr. Stanford?"

"Yes, Miss Blatter," replied Paul, who was turning an easel for Miss Lufton, on which was a picture from Tennyson's Sir Galahad, three angels bearing the Holy Grail. "Yes, that is a Caprese fisher-girl."

"I thought so, one can never mistake a face from Capri; and this is a bandit, I am sure."

"Yes, that is a copy from a sketch by my friend Cardoni."

"How good! what a rugged, weather-beaten countenance, is it not, Mr. Lufton?"

"Yes, I must confess I should not care to meet the original in a lonely lane at midnight, he looks a born cut-throat."

"But so picturesque!"

"Which covers a multitude of pecca-

dilloes in the eye of an artist, Miss Blatter," said Paul, who had been eagerly drinking in the quiet yet sensible praise bestowed on his larger picture by Miss Lufton. The elder lady's voluble criticisms on the same subject, a few minutes later, were almost distasteful to the young man, whose ears still tingled with the few sweet sentences from the lips he loved.

However, a few minutes later he found himself alone again with Grace, whilst Miss Blatter looked over a portfolio of sketches with Mr. Lufton.

Paul took down a small oval head of a Madonna, and asked his companion if she would accept it as souvenir of her visit.

"I will, with pleasure, Mr. Stanford, if you can spare it, and shall prize it highly; and it will serve to remind me of this studio when we are in India, you know," she added, in a somewhat changed and sadder tone, "we leave this next week, in fact on Monday."

Next Monday, and this was Friday! Paul's heart felt stunned as though some

one had struck a deadening blow on it with a sledge-hammer, only three more days! how could he find time and opportunity to tell her all he wanted? All he could then say was—

"So soon! next Monday! I had no idea you were going so soon," and then a pause occurred and both felt that there was something unsaid that should be spoken, perhaps even then it might have burst forth, for Paul's heart was full; but suddenly they were both awakened out of dream-land by the loud exclamations of Miss Blatter, who was holding up a small canvas to the light: it was the head of the Syed.

"Oh! Mr. Stanford! you have got that charming Indian Prince here; what an excellent likeness, but why that sinister expression? I am sure he is a most *delightful* man, so *pleasant* and *agreeable* in his manners; I never saw such a diabolical sneer as you have given him; why did you do that?"

"I am very sorry if he is a friend of yours, Miss Blatter, but I happened to

catch him one day with that expression, and expressions being quite in my line, I thought he would make a good study for some Oriental Mephistophiles."

"But I assure you he is a most *charming* man, and so *well* informed! I have met him *several* times."

"I have since made his acquaintance, and in fact have been invited by him to dinnerto-morrow, and he is as you say, a most charming man; but still I would rather not be in his power when roused, judging from that slight demoniacal ebullition which I witnessed on two occasions."

And then Paul told them how and when he had seen them.

Mr. Lufton laid down the sketch with a sotto voice remark, which was High Dutch to the others.

"Humph! a *pakka badmash*,[1] I'll bet."

Grace looked at it with a shudder, as the dark eyes seemed to pierce her through, and she felt again and again impelled to look at it, as the bird is fascinated by the

[1] A thorough bad lot.

snake, though she shivered as she did so; she had never been so moved by a picture before. The man was a stranger to her, and one of another race; did the face affect her because she was going to live amongst such people? no, she had ever cherished the idea with pleasure. The natives she had played with as a child were treasured up as old friends in her heart, and she looked forward to meeting them again, grown old and grey-headed in her father's service. She had sketches and water-colour portraits of the favourite ones hung up in her English home, so that she was on the whole prepossessed in favour of the natives, to whom Mr. Lufton had ever been considerate and sympathetic in his dealings, but the man had the face of a basilisk, and she somehow felt a presentiment that she should meet him, and all the while they were in the studio, though she resolved not to do so, she found herself stealing furtive glances at the Satanic face on the little canvas which lay on the table. Miss Blatter had got possession of a portfolio of studies from the old masters in the Uffizi and Pitti Galleries, bits here

and there out of favourite pictures, and which formed ample subject of discourse for the loquacious lady, who held forth on the excellencies of the ancient masters, and lectured Paul on his want of appreciation of Giotto, Cimabue, and the Pre-Raphaelite painters. But Paul's heart was too full of the news he had just heard, to pay much attention, and his replies were uttered at random. Mr. Lufton was bored, and Grace longed to get away from the baleful influence of the picture which had made such an impression on her, so it was a relief to them when Miss Blatter closed the portfolio and made a move.

The Luftons were engaged to dine that evening with friends who had rented a villa on Bellosguardo, and next day they were to go to a picnic at Vallambrosa, to which Paul was not invited, so he determined to get a *carrozza* and drive out to Castello, sleep there and return next day in time to dine with his new acquaintance.

As he left the Lufton party and turned down the Via Auguillara he came face to face at the corner with a portly-looking,

grey-whiskered Englishman of about fifty years of age, who had a general *bon-vivant* air about him. He had long been resident in Italy, and was a "character." If there was anything good in the way of eating and drinking to be had, old Sanderson Featherston knew where it was to be found and all about it. Amongst his intimate acquaintances he usually passed by the sobriquet of 'Downy," partly from his wideawake reputation, to which in slang phraseology the term applies, and partly from the allusion to the first portion of his surname.

"Stanford, my boy," exclaimed the new comer, seizing the artist by the button, "have you ever tasted Chianti?"

"What a question, Downy! of course I have; what joke are you up to?"

"I, dear boy, you have *never* tasted Chianti, I know. You've tasted lots of poisonous trash that passes under the name, and with a dash of pump-water is served at the hotels, but just you come along with me, I'll show you what real Chianti is."

Paul knew it was no use trying to put

off his friend, and though he devoutly wished him at Jamaica, he resigned himself to his fate, and was speedily piloted along some of the by-lanes and narrow streets bordering the Via Calzaivuli.

"There are few places in Florence where you will get better wine than where I am going to take you," remarked Mr. Featherston; "it's not a very respectable-looking place, and is frequented by perhaps doubtful people, but you need not take any notice of them, the proprietor knows me and will produce a bottle worth cracking. Baron Ricasoli has good wine, and so has the Marchesa Stufa, but I'll back the Chianti we'll get against any they will produce."

Here they turned a sharp corner and found themselves opposite a low door leading into a long dark room full of small round tables, at which were groups of men, all of the lower orders, and many of the most forbidding appearance, drinking, smoking, and playing cards or dominoes.

A greasy-looking waiter came up with a bow: "A private room, Signor Sandro?

V'bene, this way; ecco, Signori; what 'mands?"

As Paul stumbled through a short dark passage leading to an inner room he passed a door which was ajar, and to his supreme astonishment, whom should he see in earnest conversation with a sallow, flat-faced man, but his new acquaintance the Syed.

"Arcades ambo!" muttered old Featherston, as he cast a glance at them. As soon as they were settled in their own room and a bottle of the best ordered, with a morsel of cheese to bring out the flavour, Paul asked his companion who the flat-faced man was.

"That fellow! why that's Chokemoffski, of the Russian spy-service, as I call it: queer fish as ever lived, dark and deep as Erebus, and as great a linguist as Mezzofanti. Why he'll talk you off your legs in half-an-hour, in any language you may please to mention, from Patagonian to Sanscrit, and that fellow with him is another slippery customer, that Indian

prince as he calls himself, about as much a prince as I am. I expect his nobility is not much older than that of St. Ledger and Wingold, the Bankers, whom the Pope ennobled on account of the money they gave him. Count and discount as I call 'em."

"I should like to know the history of that man," said Paul.

"My dear boy, as well try and find out a reasonable theory for the origin and composition of meteors; you can but *guess* in the matter, there are some men whose lives are unfathomable, and I am sure Chokemoffski and his Eastern friend belong to the same category; but here comes the Chiante. Gently 'Tonio gently. Take a *gusto di formaggio* first; there my boy, that's *wine!*"

The wine was good, and Paul said so, and they discussed about two glasses apiece and left the rest of the flask for Antonio to finish, whilst they walked out from the reeking atmosphere of liquor and smoke, and parted company in the Piazza del

Duomo by the gate of the Baptistery of San Giovanni, Paul going on to his lodgings, whilst his companion turned down the Via Cerritani.

CHAPTER XI.

"You are a punctual man, Mr. Stanford," remarked the Syed, glancing at his costly gold repeater, on which his monogram glittered in diamonds. "Now, before we start for Doney's, let me give you a glass of sherry and bitters; we always indulge in something of the kind before dinner in India, it gives one an appetite, and is one thing for which we have to thank our western rulers."

"The habit is a novelty to me," replied Paul, "but I have no doubt it is an excellent one, so I accept the offer with thanks."

On a side-table was a tray with a decanter and glasses, and a small bottle, out of which last the Syed poured a few drops into two wine-glasses, the liquid emitting a fragrant odour of citron, the

glasses were then filled up with sherry, and, with a clink in the German fashion, tossed off.

"There are many kinds of bitters used," said the Syed, "but the sort I patronize is carefully prepared from the rind of the Pummalo or Shaddock, a gigantic citron, mixed with choice bitter herbs; now I am at your service if you feel inclined to start, I ordered dinner punctually at half-past six."

They strolled leisurely along the Lung' Arno, till they came to the Via della Vigna Nova, which led them into the Via Tornabuoni. As they turned the corner the noble pile of the Strozzi Palace stood frowning on the street in front of them, its rugged blocks of rough-hewn stone forming the basement story, with gloomy barred windows telling of a stormy age now happily past. The Oriental looked up as he went by, and said,—

"Ah! those were stirring times when chiefs held their own and were not the nonentities they are now, the phantoms of departed power."

"Rather a good thing too," replied the artist, "instead of walking the streets in comfort as we do now, we should be constantly embroiled with swash-bucklers and bravos, of the Strozzis, and the Spinis, and other firebrands of old."

"Well, so much the better, 'tis a tame life, this of ours," said the Syed, with a curl of his lip, "however, here we are at Doney's, and I doubt whether the Strozzis and Spinis, ay, or even Lorenzo the Magnificent, ever had as good a dinner as we shall get here, so there is some good to be got out of these pusillanimous times, 'tis the age of cafés and restaurants, and the peaceful slaughter of fat capons."

Dinner was laid in a private room upstairs, and comprised every delicacy that could be obtained for money, the wines, too, were excellent, and were chosen by the Syed, in a manner which showed him to be an adept in œnological science, and at which Stanford was not a little astonished, being under the impression that wine was strictly forbidden to the Moslem.

His companion caught his first glance of surprise, and laughingly remarked,—

"Ah! I see you are shocked at my apostasy, but you must know that in fact our Prophet interdicted the use of wine in a very negative sort of way, of course he meant the abuse of it was sinful, but he really could not have thought it so bad, or else he would not have promised it to us so copiously in Paradise, a veritable cup that cheers without inebriating, served by fair dark-eyed damsels. I hold rather to the advice of your Saint Paul to his friend Timothy, and am certain that had the holy Prophet been acquainted with the estimable Veuve Cliquot, he would have put in a saving clause; but the wine of Arabia must have been filthy stuff, like the arrack of Bengal, and therefore, he thought his followers had better wait till they got to Paradise."

And so with savoury entrées, good wines, and animated conversation, time passed pleasantly enough. The Syed showed himself a man of varied information, and of keen observation during his travels, and he

talked fluently and well concerning the politics, literature, and customs of the various nations he had visited; the only thing which jarred Paul's feelings was, that the Syed again spoke of his success with English ladies, and once more gave Paul to understand that he would have had no difficulty at all in selecting a wife from the ranks of the best society.

The Englishman felt his indignation aroused when the conversation took this turn, and he speedily introduced another topic.

After dinner they adjourned to the opera, where the Syed had already secured a box, and a light supper finished the evening.

"I am sorry to say good-bye to you," said the Syed, as he shook hands warmly at parting. "I wish we could meet again, but it is not likely we shall ever do so."

"Nay," replied the other. "You may revisit Florence some day, or I perhaps may go out to India; there is much there to tempt an artist."

"Well, we may possibly meet, but take my advice, don't go out to India for the

next three years. Amongst other studies I have devoted myself to astrology, and there is trouble in store for us next spring. When you see a comet of unusual magnitude you will remember my words; and when happier times come, and I am in a position to be of service to you, remember I am always your friend, Englishman though you be."

So saying he shook hands and turned away abruptly.

"A most extraordinary man," thought Stanford, as he walked home. "I wonder who and what he is. There is some mystery about him, I am sure."

As he was about to turn the corner of a street he stopped for a minute to look at the retreating figure of the Oriental, and saw him talking to another man. After a few seconds the new comer struck a fusee to light his cigarette, and as he raised it to his face the artist recognized by the transient flame the Russian, Chokemoffski.

The sun broke next morning through

Grace Lufton's window, and fell in a golden flood over the Madonna which had been transferred within the last four-and-twenty hours from Paul Stanford's studio to the wall of the little bed-room, where it faced its new owner as she lay with her head raised on a propped up pillow.

The hour of six had just struck, and it was yet too early for her to get up, as they did not breakfast till nine, and on Sunday morning she could not practise her music as she usually did on weekdays, so she lay and thought—of what?

Her eyes were dreamily fixed on the Madonna, but her heart was occupied with the painter of the picture. She did not like to confess to herself openly that she was in love with him,—no, it was not that, —but she did feel an interest in him—he was so clever and so manly and in every way nice; if she had only a brother like him how proud she would be of his talents. She had never had any one to cling to and love as others have. An only child, brought up by her father's maiden sisters, who were kind and indulgent to a

degree, but who could hardly supply the place of an absent father and long since dead mother, and as for the close ties of brothers and sisters, the nearest approach she had known was the occasional visit of two cousins, considerably younger than herself. If she had only had a brother like Paul, how nice it would have been! Altogether she acknowledged to herself considerable interest in the young artist, though she would not confess to any stronger feeling.

In idle reveries thus passed another hour, and as the neighbouring clock boomed seven a maid brought her a cup of tea, an Indian custom Mr. Lufton carried with him everywhere. He was too old a *Quihye*, he said, to do without his *chota hazari*.[1]

After this she rose and dressed. There was service in the morning in a small English chapel, and as usual Paul met them at the door when the service was over, walked back to the Pension with them, and took his leave, promising to join them in the afternoon in the Boboli gardens.

[1] *Anglice*, little breakfast.

Everybody who has stayed in Florence knows the Boboli Gardens, attached to the now Royal Pitti Palace.

Miss Blatter had pronounced the Boboli the most fatiguing place she had ever been in. The ups and downs were too trying for a stout person of her age, so after a short march she would call a halt and rest awhile; but there was no need, she declared, that the young people should do the same, Mr. Lufton would take care of her she was sure, whilst Mr. Stanford and Grace explored the beauties of the groves. Miss Blatter had made a shrewd guess as to the state of affairs, and like a good-natured woman as she was, in spite of her many eccentricities, she thought she would give the young people every chance on the last night.

Thus it was that Paul found himself wandering dreamily through the leafy aisles, deaf to the songs of birds and trilling of cicadas, blind to the effects of sunbeams flickering over mossy stones and gnarled olive trunks, or vistas of the distant Val d'Arno—deaf to all but the sweet

voice, and blind to all but the lovely face beside him. The opportunity had come at last, how was it that he now held back from the one all-engrossing subject?

The evening wore on, the sun was dipping o'er the western hills, and the gardens were thinning, as those Italians who dreaded the twilight malaria went to their homes or to the neighbouring cafés and theatres, but Paul and his young companion remained sitting under an old oak-tree at the highest part of the gardens from whence a lovely view could be had. From general topics they had gone to personal ones. Grace had told him of her life with her old aunts in their quiet country home, and he had in turn recounted much of his boyish days, and how he had taken up the career of an artist. Somehow as they sat close their hands came accidentally into contact, and as Paul closed his over the little fingers, that trembled as they rested in his palm, he saw that they were not withdrawn, and his heart filled with hope. And after a few minutes

he could no longer restrain himself, but burst forth with his petition.

"Oh, Grace! before we part, say you will give me this little hand!"

But she hung her head and answered not.

He pleaded earnestly, it was presumption on his part to think of her now, yet he might some day make a great name, and he had means already,—a moderate competence to offer her. He did not mind waiting and working, if she would but say she would be his.

Ere she could reply they heard Mr. Lufton's voice calling to his daughter, and the next moment he appeared close at hand, so whatever Grace might have said was abruptly stopped, but as she rose she lifted her large brown eyes to Paul's, and gave him a deep, earnest look, which satisfied him he had not pleaded in vain.

Paul never anathematized Miss Blatter so heartily as he did on this occasion, when that worthy lady screamed out, "Well, young folks, I thought it time to send Mr. Lufton to look after you, for the malaria at

this time of the year is very bad, and we ought to be getting away from these trees."

Paul did not know that he owed his opportunity to Miss Blatter, or else, though vexed at her interruption, he would have vowed eternal gratitude to her. As it was he felt savage and yet supremely happy, for though Grace had said nothing, still that last glance told him that the answer would have been favourable.

He determined to speak to Mr. Lufton that night, for next morning they were to leave, and then if he were accepted as a future son-in-law he would go down with them as far as Brindisi, and perhaps even to India in the same steamer. And so he built castles in the air as they walked home, for he had no further opportunity of talking to Grace, of whose arm Miss Blatter had taken possession.

On arrival at the Pension, Paul asked Mr. Lufton if he would go on a little further with him, as he had something to say.

He at once agreed, saying it would suit

him very well, for he would like to smoke a cigar in the open air. "Have one?" he added, offering his case of Manillas.

"No, thank you," said Paul, "not to-night." And then as they walked along he plunged at once into his subject.

Mr. Lufton took it very quietly, uttering not a word till the young man had said his say, but puffing vigorously at his cigar. At last he answered,—

"Well, Stanford, in the first place Grace is very young—too young to marry just yet, and I naturally do not wish to part with her for a few years—"

"I will wait, sir," broke in Paul.

"Yes, my dear fellow, I have no doubt you would do so, but now I must come to some other prosaic matters, which every parent must look to who wishes to see his daughter settled in life. I like you personally very much, but I do not quite like the profession you have chosen. An artist may be a perfect gentleman, indeed most are, but his income is frequently an insufficient and precarious one, and his status is not high, unless he attain exceptional

eminence in his art. I believe, however, that you are beyond the possibility of want by the possession of private means, is it not so?"

"I have eight hundred a year of my own in the funds," answered the young artist, rather shortly, "and my family is an old one."

"I knew an old Sir Gervase Stanford when I was a boy," remarked Mr. Lufton, "he had a fine property in a county in which some of my people lived. He was a very old man when I was a mere stripling."

"He was my grandfather."

"Indeed! I was several times on the point of asking you whether you were of the same family. And the present baronet?"

"Is my uncle. There is another life between me and the title, that of my Cousin George, so I am not very likely to get it."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Lufton, as he thought to himself, "fairly off and of first-rate family, with a prospect of a baronetcy, for with one unmarried life between there

is always the chance. I have known a case of three lives between, but it must not be yet, they are both young and may change their minds; it will be better to wait—much better." So he added aloud,—

"Well Stanford, I will agree to a provisional engagement only. You must wait for three years, and work hard at the profession you have chosen; if at the end of that time you are both of the same mind I shall not oppose any obstacle. Grace is my only child, and I have saved a considerable sum of money which will be hers at my death, or her marriage with you (if she is married to you, that is to say) I will raise your income to fifteen hundred a year, and you may then either go on painting or not as you please, but these are my conditions. You may think them hard, for in your present state of mind any precautionary measures will be irksome. I felt the same under similar circumstances, but the probation will be for the ultimate good of both. In the first place, I must have no settled engagement, you must both be absolutely

free for three years, free to change your minds. Secondly, I must have no corresponding; this may seem unreasonably hard, but I have known much evil arise from letter-writing, and it is better that you should meet again as friends only than as letter-lovers. And thirdly, if you do meet before the three years are over, I must rely upon your honour not to press your suit upon Grace till the time has expired. I shall repeat faithfully to Grace this evening the conditions I have made, and after you have said good-bye to us at the railway station to-morrow, you will remember that you are undergoing a period of trial which, please God, will have a bright ending. Write to me as often as you like, I shall always be a good friend to you, and will never attempt to influence her heart in favour of any other, be he ever so eligible a match, that I promise you, but as regards herself she must be quite free."

Paul of course thought the impositions hard and unreasonable, but he was glad to get any terms, and so professed his willingness to abide by the conditions.

He begged to be allowed to see Grace once more before the final farewell, but Mr. Lufton was stern: "It would only unnecessarily distress her," he said. So the young man had to content himself with the hope of seeing her at the station.

"Mr. Lufton said that *after* our farewell the conditions were to be in force, therefore if I have a chance I will say all I can before the last minute."

With this resolve he said good-night, and turned homewards, but he felt little inclined to go home. The idea of his usual little supper was distasteful to him, the few slices of tongue or cold chicken done up in cool vine leaves, rolls of French bread, and pats of butter, with a goodly flask of purple wine, which night after night his factotum, Leonardo, used to lay out on a snowy cloth in his little salon, for Paul rented an entresol flat in a Palazzo and lived comfortably for a bachelor. Leonardo was one of the privileged sort of old servants, who would retail all the news of the day. He stood motionless and mute for awhile behind his master's chair, but at the first "Ebbene,

Leonardo, any news?" the floodgates of garrulosity would be thrown wide, and at times his master would find it difficult to stop the torrent.

Paul was a kind master and humoured the veteran, who had fought against the Austrians, but, as he used to say, Leonardo would never do for any one else.

However, on this evening Paul felt little inclined for Leonardo's gossip, so instead of going home he turned down the Via de Bardi, and took his way up the San Miniato hill. The moon was rising as he walked up the hilly road marked by the Stations of the Cross, and she was well over the horizon as he reached the summit. Here he found a quiet corner on the platform near the church and in a shadowy nook he ensconced himself on a low parapet, the Arno and the city lying below his feet.

But Paul thought little of the familiar view, which at other times had always had a charm for him; his mind was full of the future, and of the conditions imposed upon him; a new life was henceforward opening to him, a life with a purpose. He had

always thought before that he had a purpose in his life, that he was working towards an end, but how trivial did all his aspirations now appear, compared with the prize he was to contend for. Three years! it was a hard probation, even three months he would have thought a trial, but to be separated for three years, it was indeed hard. But he would work and make himself a name, the Academy walls should annually bear testimony to his worth, and praise from captious critics reach his idol far over the sea.

Here two men came up the hill, and not seeing the recumbent lover, sat down on the angle of the parapet wall.

"I tell you the mine is almost ready to spring," said one of the two, and Paul started, as he recognized the voice of the Syed. Not wishing to play the part of an eaves-dropper, he would have declared himself at once, but partly because he was not in the mood to endure the Indian's badinage, at thus being found in such a sentimenta spot, and partly in the hope that the two men would move off soon, he

held back. The Syed's companion gave a sort of cackle, which was intended for a laugh, as he replied,—

"Take care you clear the débris, when you spring your mine."

"No fear of that, we are no fools, although we may not be up to you in cleverness."

"Ay, but you have got a dogged lot to deal with, as we know to our cost."

"Bah, you were outnumbered, it was a case of five to one; but the question is, suppose the first stroke fails, and we want help, can you give it, and how?"

"My friend, before I answer that question, or touch on delicate ground, allow me to ask you, if you are acquainted with the Persian language, for if you are, I would rather converse in that tongue, considering that the very stones here understand English, and what with prying tourists and sentimental fools, commend me to Florence for the most unsafe place for state secrets."

"I did not know you were a Persian scholar, Chokemoffski."

"I? why I know every language under the sun; it's my trade, however, my learned Syed; here goes for the noble tongue of the poet Sadi."

The rest of the conversation was quite unintelligible to Paul, and as he did not like to disclose himself, and his conscience was relieved of the odium of being a spy, he resigned himself to his thoughts, and waited patiently through a long and earnest discussion between the curiously assorted pair, almost within arm's length of his corner.

At last as midnight struck, they got up and left, and Paul followed them, and took his way home.

Next morning, Paul was at the coach-office, where after a time appeared Mr. Lufton, his daughter, and Miss Blatter, with porters carrying various portmanteaux and other impedimenta.

Paul was received with cordiality by the two elders, and a soft warm grasp of the hand by the young girl, whilst her eyes looked bravely and lovingly into his; they waited for a while in a little room belong-

ing to the office whilst the coach was being packed, and the horses put in ; now and then Mr. Lufton went out, and occasionally Miss Blatter, and once Grace was called out by her father, when old Miss Blatter suddenly seized Paul's hand and excitedly whispered,—"I know all about it, Mr. Stanford. I was sure of it before, when I persuaded Mr. Lufton I was too fat for those hills in the Boboli gardens, so that you two might go on alone." ("You dear old girl," thought Paul, "how I wronged you!" and he gave the old woman's hand a squeeze that made her cry out.) "Oh, dear me, you've quite driven that diamond ring the Rajah of Bobripore gave dear Joe, who gave it to me, into my finger, but never mind. Look here, I am going with them to Brindisi, and I am not sure but I may go on with them to India, just to see dear Joe, you know, but as long as I am with them I'll write to you all about the dear child, and you write to me, mind, nice letters, which I can show her, and keep up your spirits, all will come right. Yes, Mr. Lufton, that is my bandbox, and

I should like it inside, please. Gracie dear, just hold this bag whilst I ask your father to tell the people to put in quiet horses, and not give us a tipsy driver."

And Miss Blatter, with an intelligent look at the young couple, bustled out of the little room and left them alone.

At the same moment the driver sounded his horn, there was not a moment to be lost.

"Gracie, let me once hear from your own lips that you love me."

"I do, Paul, I do, and always shall."

The young man impetuously folded her in his arms, and gave her one long last kiss. Miss Blatter had admirably covered the advance by a sharp file-firing of questions and instructions, and having as she thought sufficiently diverted the enemy, she now fell back and allowed Mr. Lufton to call for his daughter.

A few minutes more and the young man was looking with aching heart at the diligence, as it rattled down the street, bearing away the prize he had only just gained.

CHAPTER XII.

THE station of Amānpur was built on the watershed of the Bursati river, on high ground, forming the crest of a ridge beyond which lay a cultivated plain, bounded by low hills.

Although the district was one which excelled in natural beauty, it could not be said that the station had any pretensions in that way. A long dusty road, devoid of trees, was dotted here and there with the bungalows of the civil stations, whilst the military lines were on a continuation of the same road, divided from the civil by a straggling native village. Behind the Sepoy lines, on a slight eminence, rose the city of Amānpur, containing a mixed population of Mahomedans and Hindus. It owed its origin and its name to one Amā-

nut Ali, a leader of forces under the Emperor Aurungzebe, who, like many of the Mogul generals, perceiving that the land was fertile and pleasant, built a city and called it after his own name, partly influenced no doubt by the existence of a tomb of a Mahomedan *Vali* or saint on the banks of the Bursati—a shrine of reputed sanctity.

The situation was also strategically of some importance, as it in a measure commanded the approach to the fort of Asālgurh, belonging to a chief of a Rujpoot clan, at that time a minor and under the guardianship of his mother.

The Rani of Asālgurh was a woman of about five-and-twenty, reputed to be of great beauty, indifferent moral character, and vast energy. Her son was an infant at the time of which we speak, her authority was supreme as regent, and her great ambition was to restore the traditional glories of her house.

In the days of the Mahrattas the Thakoor of Asalgurh held, though his territory was of limited extent, an independent rule

over his people under a feudal allegiance to the Peishwa. He had the power of life and death over his subjects, and supreme control over the settlement of landed property, but when the suzerainty passed into the hands of the British, those privileges were absorbed by the ruling power, and the district was brought under the administration of English officers, a fixed annual stipend on a liberal scale being allotted to the Rajah out of the revenues.

The late Thakoor of Asālgurh was well contented with the arrangement, for he was an easy-going voluptuary, of no particular ambition so long as his sensual appetites were gratified, and the pension assigned to him was in reality more than he used to get at the time when his own Dewans and Naibs had the management of his exchequer, and as he had no trouble about the matter, he concerned himself but little respecting it; but the officials who under the old régime lined their own pockets freely from the state revenues, and the haughty young Rani who belonged to a family proud and long-descended almost as

the Ranas of Oodeypore, by no means so quietly acquiesced in the arrangement as did the old Thakoor. They were, however, powerless to act, and their grumblings, lamentations, and futile resentments were not heard outside the frowning walls of the gloomy fortress.

The old chief was in September, 1856, taken seriously ill of a complaint engendered by his irregular habits, and as the native *kobiraj* was unsuccessful in his treatment, the dying Thakoor sent for the English Civil Surgeon of the station, but he too was of no avail, the patient died and the young Rani reigned in his stead.

What was the fancy she took to the dry, caustic old Scotchman nobody could say, but certain it was that McTaggart was the only European who entered the sacred precincts of the zenana at Asālgurh and the wags of the station declared that the old fellow used to wear a gold bangle given to him by the Rani, and used to chaff him on his frequent visits to the Fort, and call him a wicked old man.

Occasionally the Rani would pass a day

in one of several garden-houses she had a few miles out of Amānpur, and her journeys to and from these bowery retreats were characterized by the eastern pomp consistent with her rank.

First would come runners with maces clearing the way, and shouting forth the titles of their lord, then half-a-dozen horsemen on screws with dyed tails, and heterogeneous accoutrements, then drummers and musicians, then elephants and more mounted rabble, then a punchy oilcake-and-ghee-fed cream-coloured charger, so fattened-up as to be streaming with perspiration at the mere effort of ambling, his tail and mane dyed pink, with rings of the same all over his body, a golden head-stall and bridle, with which ill-assorted a dirty red rag, which acted as a standing martingale, a saddle-cloth of gold embroidery of Burhampur, on which was seated a chubby bright-eyed boy of about six years of age, held on by attendants on either side, whilst two men led the horse, two others held the stirrups, and about six more ran alongside waving horse-tail fly-whisks mounted in

silver. This was the young Thakoor of Asālgurh; behind him in a gorgeous litter of crimson cloth, was borne his mother, the Rani. Of course she was not visible, as the curtains were close drawn all round, but there were convenient slits on either side through which she could peep, unseen of the vulgar world.

Behind her litter came five or six more of inferior quality, bearing her ladies and hand-maids, the procession being brought up by more rabble on horse-back, and coolies bearing large baskets.

It was her custom to appear in public thus attended, even though the distance to be travelled did not exceed a mile and a half.

Sometimes the young officers of the 77th Native Infantry, which garrisoned the cantonment of Amānpur, would ride out to see the fun, and would look hard at the Rani's litter, to try if they could get a glimpse of the fair one, of whose beauty they had heard exaggerated reports; but the haughty princess closed her curtains still more firmly on such occasions, and

the opportunity was denied to all, save one young ensign, who, mounted on a vicious little country *tat*, was backed into a ditch by the road-side as the young Thakoor passed on a huge tusker elephant. His mother was behind in her litter, and she threw open her curtains, and looked out laughingly at the poor boy's predicament.

The vision was but a transient one, for the procession swept on and the Rani drew back into seclusion, but the young Englishman was quite smitten, and returned to the station with a glowing account of the beautiful Rani, which of course sent more knights errant out on the Asālgurh road, and added fresh zest to the attacks on the doctor.

The civil officers of the station of Amānpur consisted of the Commissioner, the Judge, the deputy Commissioner with his assistant, a deputy collector in charge of the treasury, two police officers, and the civil surgeon; there was also a collector of customs in charge of the cordon of guards employed in the prevention of the smuggling of salt, on which article a heavy tax was levied by Government, and he was

assisted by three European patrols, one at head-quarters and the other two at out-posts.

The military society of the station comprised the usual complement of officers of a Native Infantry regiment, many of whom were married.

The place had credit for much sociability and both military and civil pulled well together; the climate was good, and though so isolated, the station was a favourite one with all classes.

There was a theatre and racquet-court, and in the commissioners' compound a fine swimming-bath, which was thrown open to the station, and the surrounding country swarmed with game, large and small, beside fishing in the Bursati. In the cold season picnics were got up in the surrounding hills, and occasionally the ladies were taken out to tiger hunts, when, securely placed on high platforms made in trees they could see without danger the royal animal driven out of his lair by the adventurous sportsmen.

In the early mornings the winding road

which led down past the Dargali-i-Pir, or shrine of the saint, to the river, and thence along the banks, with a wide sweep back again to the cantonments, was thronged with the English residents of the place, enjoying on horseback the cool breezes of the dawn. The commissioner was on his powerful Cape horse; the judge and his daughter were on their mettlesome Arabs; the minor stars on Cabulees, country-breds, and *tats*. In the evening the same course presented a more lively aspect, as the officers off duty swelled the ranks of the equestrians, with every variety of the equine race, from the colonel's charger of the fiery blood of Nejd to young Wigley's vicious country pony "Bobtail," who got him the introduction to the Rani. On alternate nights the regimental band played outside the mess-house, and made a pleasant rendezvous for all who felt gregariously and sociably inclined. Society in such a place is vastly different to society in the English acceptation of the term. It can only be compared with that on board ship after a long voyage of some months. There is

no keeping up false appearances, no pretending to be what you are not. Your income is known to a pice, and your faults and foibles are equally known to the finest shade. There is less humbug and more warmhearted intercourse, and the friendships formed are frequently for life, though fate may sever you after a few months' companionship. It is not to be supposed that there are not envyings, bickerings, and strife in such a life. There are too often petty hidden jealousies and open animosities, at times a cliquism which rends a community, and makes it a matter of considerable tact as to who shall be invited to dinner, so that a Capulet shall not meet a Montagu, but happily there was no such difficulty at Amānpur, for with few exceptions the utmost friendliness prevailed.

The 77th had not long been in the station, and had been met by the civilians with the greatest cordiality.

The commissioner, Colonel Spenser, was a large-hearted Irishman, whose house was ever open to all, down to little Wigley,

who used to run in and out like a tame rabbit, and who was "awfully" in love with Mrs. Spenser, whose winsome face would beam with motherly smiles as she helped him plentifully at *chota hazari* to *ripari* jam and luscious peaches. Had she not sons of her own just like him? and ever as she heaped his plate she thought of her bonny boys across the seas.

Next to the commissioner's house, or residency as it was called, came the deputy commissioner's, a low, untidy-looking building, with a garden overgrown with weeds, and a few unkempt clumps of bamboos and stunted *babul*-trees in the compound. Half-a-dozen *sowars* were generally picketed in front of the porch, and an elephant and some camels were in possession of the furthest corner, for Capt. Haile was a bachelor, and was bound up in his work, living almost entirely in camp, and was supposed to be a confirmed misogynist, although some doubt had been cast on this by his being reported to have lost his heart to pretty Mrs. Futterbly, the patrol's wife, who lived next door, but his

devotion consisted mainly in his sending over his share of the club mutton, and living on bazar goat.

For the benefit of our English readers we may here explain that it is a common practice in India for several people to join in a sheep club, one of the members undertaking the purchase and care of the animals, also the distribution of the various parts when killed, according to fixed rotation, to the shareholders. It is not as a rule economical, but the method ensures good meat, whereas the so-called mutton of the bazar is generally goat. About half way down the civil station was a cross road, and a few hundred yards from the intersection, on the right hand, was a large handsome gateway arched over and surmounted by a nondescript animal intended by the native artist for a lion, and an awful idea of the king of beasts it conveyed to the unsophisticated villager, who gazed timorously at the wide mouth, like that of a shark, full of serrated teeth, the staring eyes and close curling mane, which to the casual observer might convey the

idea of scales, like those of a dragon, or anything else but hair.

Through the gateway a broad gravel road, shaded by an avenue of bamboos, swept with a graceful curve through an undulating park up to a solidly built square house of two stories, a verandah all round, and a massive portico in front, where the carriage-drive swept round in a circle, in the centre of which was a fountain surrounded by choice flowering shrubs.

The compound, if one could so term the park-like extent of land around the house, was ornamented by clumps of trees, from the stately banyan to the tall feathery casuarina, the latest importation, under which sported various kinds of deer and antelope. An irregular piece of water covered with the crimson water-lily, the sacred Lotus of the Brahmins, added greatly to the beauty of the grounds, whilst behind the house an extensive flower and fruit garden stretched away for a considerable distance, and in a retired situation, hidden by judiciously planted groups

of trees en echelon, were the stables and servants' houses. The only building near the house was the kitchen, which, as is customary in India, was detached, but the exterior was more ornamental than is usual with the Indian *Bawurchee khana*, and was also screened to some extent by oleander and orange bushes.

The residence itself was a commodious building, with a hall, drawing, dining, and billiard-rooms, also a study or library on the ground floor, and several suites of bed and dressing-rooms above.

Here lived the Judge of Amānpur, Mr. Lufton, and here had his daughter Grace spent the first year of her return to the land of her birth, in fact to the home of her nativity, for her father was the oldest resident of the place, and she had been born in that very house. It seldom happens that an Indian official remains for so many years in one district, not unfrequently so soon as a man has become acquainted with, and interested in the place and people committed to his charge, he is ordered off somewhere else, and has to give

way to a new comer, who goes through the same routine and results.

It is obvious that the more intimate an officer is with the details of his district, and the home life of its people, their individual characters and circumstances, the more valuable he is to the government he represents, and one would argue from this that it would be desirable to have an officer as long as possible in a position where such efficiency might be attained. It is, however, not always so, and we have heard it said that in one province it was only necessary, if an officer disliked his district and wished for a change, to give rise to a report, intended to reach the ears of the local authorities, that he was building a house or was getting up a grand piano from Calcutta, and the next gazette would transfer him from the spot where he was supposed to be making himself too comfortable.

Mr. Lufton had been an exception to this rule, and save for a few years' absence, almost all his Indian life had been spent in the Amānpur Division.

Next to the commissioner's the judge's house was the favourite rendezvous in the station, perhaps more so with the younger and more sentimental of the bachelors, for Grace Lufton was an attraction, and delightful as everybody agreed Mrs. Spenser was, still she could not compete with the young girl, who caused many sleepless nights to the amorous youth of the cantonment, and who, it was reported, had refused about one offer a month since she had returned to India.

On the other side of the road was a large wilderness-like garden, chiefly of orange, custard-apple, and pomegranate trees, with an ill-repaired sort of pavilion house in the centre belonging to the Rajah, but which was never visited by the Rani, and was in consequence suffered to relapse into a tangled thicket.

The country beyond this was highly cultivated up to the foot of the hills, much of the land being devoted to that profitable crop—sugar-cane, and the dead silence of the plain was frequently broken

by the creaking of water-wheels, or the harsher grating of the crushing-mills.

Reverting to the main road of the station, the next house of any consequence was that of Dr. McTaggart, a large straggling bungalow, with an avenue of bigonias leading up to it from the gate. It was chiefly noticeable on account of the Madrasee servants, who with their peculiarly cut tunics, large turbans, and voluminous under garments were very unlike the natives of the place. Dr. McTaggart belonged to the Madras Presidency, and had imported his own domestics.

Beyond his house were the public offices the commissioner's, magistrates, and judges kutcherries, the treasury, a police-station, and the bazar, which divided the civil and military stations.

CHAPTER XIII.

"KHAN SAHIB, you were nearly interrupted at your prayers this morning."

The speaker was a pert young Khidmatgar who, whilst refilling his hookah with fresh water, thus addressed a tall, stern-looking old chupprassee, who looked at him with a cynical expression as he cleansed his pipe. The orderly was a new comer and was not particularly a favourite with the old servants. He was a foreigner, an Afghan, or Pathan of the frontier as they thought, and he had peculiar religious views, a strictness which they did not all approve of, and his rigid observances of the stated times for prayer were frequently the subject of slight inuendoes. They did not dare to venture on open ridicule, for there was something in the flash of the gaunt old man's eye that invariably checked

the boldest of them. The new comer was, in fact, our old friend the Haji, who had now been domiciled with the Luftons for about a month. The old man had created a favourable impression both with his master and the young mistress of the house, for he was different from all the others, and he was liked none the less for his blunt and rugged manner. Grace called him her Ursa Major, and the old veteran's grim visage wore its most amiable expression when she made him follow her about in the garden in the early morning, loading him with the flowers which she cut for the vases in the drawing-room. On her arrival at Amānpur, she, to the great disgust of the *Sirdar Mali*,[1] took the arrangement of the bouquets into her own hands, and insisted on selecting her own flowers.

At such times the Haji would stalk gravely behind her like a gaunt wolf-hound following an airy gazelle, and the close observer might notice a softness in his eye as he watched the young girl flitting about the rose bushes.

[1] Head gardener.

He had observed many things carefully since he had entered the service of an infidel, and as the study was new to him he was of course more critical than his fellow-servants, who had been brought up in the presence of their white master. But there were several main points on which he had desired to inform himself before he entered upon the solemn antagonism to which he was sworn, if so be that they were the enemies of his faith. That the English were an irreligious nation he had heard over and over again. The first thing a Mussulman or even idolatrous Hindoo did on founding a village or city was to be build a mosque or temple, but it was the last thing the English thought of doing, and he had passed through many English stations which had no special house of prayer.

Amānpur had been long a station before the present church was built, therefore it must be that the English were an irreligious race.

The next great question, and one which concerned him more was, how did they

behave as touching the faithful, so on his installation as an orderly, he spread, at the stated times, his carpet in a little empty room at the end of a back verandah, and recited his customary prayers in a sonorous tone, rather to the astonishment of his fellow servants, who from their experience of European masters fully expected his speedy expulsion; but fortunately for him Mr. Lufton was not only an indulgent master, but one who held strong religious views, and as the hum of the Haji's Arabic recitation fell on his ears, he not only tacitly allowed the proceeding, but refrained at such times from calling for his pious follower. He himself had his fixed hours for family worship, morning and evening, a proceeding too often neglected in Anglo-Indian households, and he was the last man who would interfere in the worship of the Deity by any one, be he Jew, Turk, or Pagan.

It so happened on the morning alluded to by the young Khidmatgar, that the colonel of the 77th called at an early hour to ride out with Mr. Lufton on a committee

of inspection regarding a sanitary improvement affecting the station generally, both civil and military, and the grey dawn had hardly broken into the golden tints of approaching sun-rise when they sat down to chota hazari, or early tea and toast, in the verandah outside the breakfast-room. It was then that the colonel, a strict martinet as regarded his establishment, was startled by the fervent outpourings of the Haji.

"I say, Lufton, do you allow that sort of thing in your house?" he remarked.

"Well, yes, I do not see any reason to interfere; my views may be peculiar, Gray, but neither you nor I would break in upon a devout Christian at his prayers, and therefore I do not consider it right to do so when a man of another way of thinking is addressing his Maker."

"Well, perhaps you're right, but somehow one does not seem to think that those poll-parroty prayers are anything but humbug, and I confess I should feel inclined to kick one of my servants out of doors if he began that sort of thing in the

house; they have their own houses, or can do it in the open air, you know, but you're too easy-going, Lufton, and spoil your people, you always were too soft-hearted, old fellow, when we were at school together."

"Never mind, Gray," replied the other, laying his hand on the colonel's as it rested on the table and giving it a gentle squeeze, "fair and softly goes far in the day, and I remember the time when Tommy Gray was as soft-hearted as any in the school, though a demon at his fists when roused, and I doubt whether military discipline has done more than put an outer calcareous crust on him; but I do not encourage all my followers to make a Masjid of my verandah, it is only an old Pathan fellow who is a bit of a character in his way, a rough old diamond, who has this privilege, and I do not like to hurt the old man's feelings in any way by interdicting what I admire him for. We are too much given to putting down conscientiousness to bigotry and very often to humbug, but I must say, I like a man for acting up to his religion and ruling himself by it, and I do not

respect the easy-going Hinduized Mussulmans of these parts."

"My dear Lufton, you're half a Mahomedan yourself; however, come along, the sun is getting up and we shall have Spenser and the others swearing at us like troopers. Ah, Gracie! my bird of the dawn! come and give your father's old friend a kiss. What a tall young woman you are to be sure, and it seems only yesterday I took you up out of the nurse's arms inquiring anxiously whether your head was screwed on tight. What are you going to do this morning? you see you are done out of your early ride, as both your father and I are on this confounded committee."

"Oh, I have plenty to do, Colonel Gray; Ursa Major and I are going on an expedition to the fowl-house, and then to cut flowers for the room."

"Ursa Major! who on earth is he?"

"A dear old savage papa has just got for an orderly chupprassee."

"What, that old howler who has been treating us to a dose of the Quran in the verandah? A Wahabi fanatic from the

frontier!" (The speaker little knew how near he was to the mark.)

"Don't abuse my pet attendant, Colonel Gray; he is a dear old soul and much nicer than these cringing creatures about here."

"Well, well, I agree with you, Gracie, I do like the frontier men and the Sikhs better than the folks here about. They are fine fellows, and confound 'em, they licked us more than once, if they had only known it. I shan't forget Ferozeshah in a hurry as long as the damp weather touches up my old scars. I have known some uncommonly fine fellows among them, ay, and chivalrous fellows too. Well, good-bye, my dear, good-bye; give my salaam to Ursa Major. Come along, Lufton; Spenser 'll get apoplexy if you keep him long in the sun."

And thus it was that the young Khidmatgar, who understood English as well as the Judge's head Baboo did, though he would not acknowledge it, rallied the Haji on his morning's devotions.

"And pray who would disturb me?" asked the Peon in a distant tone.

"Urré Bhai! it is good for you that you have a master who would not mind if you were to proclaim the *Azān* from the housetop, but most of the Sahibs are like that colonel who came this morning, and who said in my hearing that if a servant of his made such a noise in the house he would kick him out."

The old Haji's eye flashed for a second, but he calmly answered,—

"Well, brother, and the master, what did he say?"

"Oh, the master, you know, he is a very straight sort of man, and cherishes us all, so he said as it would not be right to disturb a Christian at his prayers, it would not be right in the sight of Allah to hinder the prayers of any one else."

"The Sahib says right," broke in the portly old Khansamah, who was sitting cross-legged on a roomy arm-chair, which constituted his throne as magnate of the commissariat and cookery department; "and it is true that though individual Sahibs, sons of Satan, do occasionally insult those who wish to offer up their

prayers in their houses, yet they are generally of the inferior sort—the real Sahibs who govern the country are always wise and tolerant, and respect our religion. I have served thirty years always in the higher families and have never been insulted in my devotions."

"Ay, Khansamahjee, your worship has never served a Pultania Sahib[1];" thus remarked the younger table-servant with a grin; "I did for a year, and I got more *gali* and boots at my head than blessings."

"Bah! Pultania Sahibs are always so; everybody knows their service is not an *izzat ka nokri* (honourable service), but there is money to be made out of it, or else such as you would not take it, but for me, I have always kept to the higher Sahibs."

"Yes, Khansamahjee, your fortune is good and you have grown grey in the service of a master who has cherished you, but till I came here, if I wanted a day's leave for *roza* or *red*, I got *gali* and a shoe beating, and if I had been caught at

[1] A military officer.

prayers in a verandah, I should have got the alms of the stick; but then, as you say, Khansamahjee, Pultania Sahibs are always so, they have got neither caste nor religion amongst themselves, and they don't like others to have any either."

"That is why they have been mixing bone-dust with the flour lately, and pig's fat in the cartridges served out to the *sipahis*," remarked another Khidmatgar, who had hitherto been silent; "I was down in the bazar yesterday and heard that the *sipahis* of the regiment have sworn that they will not use the new ammunition after the old is expended, and news has come from Achamik,[2] near Calcutta, that a regiment refused to take the cartridges, and that they were surrounded by European soldiers and guns, and were all shipped off across the Black water."

"But is that true, brother?" demanded the Haji.

"Allah knows! but it is the report in the bazar, and they say that the *Kotwal's* brother, who is a cloth merchant at Patna,

[2] Barrackpore.

has heard all about it from his correspondents in Calcutta, and it has made a great noise throughout all the country, and men's livers are drying up, and their hearts turning to water, when they think of what is to come; and I have heard"—continued tke speaker in a mysterious whisper—"that it has been prophesied that the rule of the English is to terminate this year, and that there shall be a sign set in the sky of a fiery besom, wherewith they are to be all swept away."

"Astagfur ullah!" muttered the old Khansamah, as the thought of his occupation being gone rose to his mind: he had feathered his nest well out of the English, and had found them easy masters, and therefore he had no wish to see them expelled.

The Haji gave him a quick glance as he remarked,—

"The English are truthful, have they ever denied these reports?"

"So they have, but people always take greater pains to throw dust in your eyes when they meditate treachery, so why

should they not tell lies to serve their turn?"

"But what does our Sahib say? have you heard anything from him?"

"Yes," broke in the young Khidmatgar, "I was standing behind his chair at dinner at the Commissioner Sahib's house one evening last week, and another Sahib was talking to my Sahib about the cartridge and bone-flour reports, and the other Sahib said, why does not the Government deny the rumour by beat of drum in all the bazars; and our Sahib said no, that would only make people more suspicious; we know it to be false, but we could not persuade people to believe us, so we can only watch, wait, and be prepared, and Allah will teach them in time to trust us more; but the other Sahib shook his head, and said that bad days were coming. And I have heard in the bazars that there will be a war soon—some say the Persians are coming to drive out the English, others say the Russians."

"The Persians are dogs," snorted the Haji, who, true to his Wahabi instincts,

hated the Shiahs; "and as for the Russ, if you are to have infidel masters, better the English a thousand times!"

"Ai, Khan Sahib, what do you know about the Russ?" inquired the Khansamah.

"I have heard of them in the north," replied the Haji curtly, as he cooled down from his temporary outburst; and so saying, he got up and returned to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAZILLA was making cakes for the early meal, or *nashta*, her little hands were busy kneading the flour with water and salt, rolling it into balls, and then by skilful clapping between her palms, spreading out the paste into thin wafers about nine inches in diameter, which were at the right moment adroitly dropped on an iron plate, placed over a bright charcoal fire, and toasted till they were firm enough to lift by the edges, when they were turned over to bake on the other side.

Very tempting was the smell of the hot unleavened bread, as cake after cake was turned off the girdle to swell the pile on the platter by the girl's side, and when old Amirun turned out a savoury pot of *khichri*, the whole apartment was filled with a grateful aroma.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning, and the house was partly closed on account of the summer heat, fine bamboo blinds, which served to keep out both glare and flies being let down in each doorway.

There was a drowsy humming of bees in the little garden adjoining the Zenana compound, and from the over-shadowing *nim* tree came the monotonous call of that harbinger of summer, the red-headed barbet,—the coppersmith, as he is called by the natives, from his metallic note, which sounds like the regular stroke of a hammer. Gauzy-winged dragon-flies of bronzed and golden hues flitted about, to be anon chased and snapped up by an observant bee-eater, or agile Drongo shrike.

Butterflies of every tint, and of the angular shape familiar to most of us from the representations on Chinese fans, hovered about, or hung from the nectarous trumpet-flowers of the scarlet Russellia. Somnolent crows cackled querulously to each other as they dozed in the shade, only to be wakened to their usual restless

energy when some fragment was thrown out from the kitchen, and occasionally roused to increased action by the petulant scream of the kite, as he swooped on the coveted morsel. Under the eaves of the house, and up the ringed stems of the stately Palmyras frisked the little grey squirrels, and now and then one would slyly peep in at the door, with a jerk of his tail, as he sniffed up the grateful smell of the hot cakes.

Amina Beebee was troubled in spirit, for the Hakīm was later than usual, and the *khichri* would get cold, the *chuppattis* leathery, and his favourite dish of savoury meat balls, *kufta kawāb*, which she had made, as she always did, with her own hands, would be quite spoilt. Why was he so late? he was never so unpunctual before, how was it?

Here old Amirun began to grumble about the uselessness of cooking for men who did not know what it was to be punctual—this was the first shortcoming in this respect of the old physician—as nice a *khichri* as ever was made, fit

for the Badshah of Delhi, was getting cold and uneatable, to say nothing of the *chuppattis* and other things; here poor Fazilla looked mournfully at her pile of cakes. Why could not the Shēkhji come to time like other folk; her husband when he was alive was as exact as a *kacheri* clock, but then he was a government officer, and soldiers had to be punctual. Ah! here he comes at last, and, bap-re! he looks as sour as an *aoula* berry: what was the matter?

The Hakīm certainly looked grave, but he did not merit the epithet of sour, as applied by the unthinking virago. Such an expression would have been entirely foreign to his benevolent face; he looked grave and sad, but he saluted his adopted daughter with almost more than usual tenderness, and as he sat down to his meal with his grandson who followed him, he explained that business with the Munshi Karīm-ullah had detained him longer than he expected.

He did not say much more; to the nature of the business he made no further allusion, but his old wife knew that some-

thing had greatly troubled him; in vain she pressed him to eat the delicacies she had prepared, but he had no appetite, and the little he partook of was eaten in silence, which was unusual with him, for he was in the habit of conversing at meals, both from his innate cheery nature and from his professional opinion that pleasant conversation was healthful during meals, as preventing the too hasty despatch of food.

No wonder then the members of his family were surprised and alarmed, for they were assured some great trouble only could have thus disturbed the equanimity of the *Hakīm*, but they dared not ask. Amina Beebee was the only one who could have ventured to do so, and she knew her lord would tell her by and by, for he had no secrets from her, and she was content to wait.

So the meal was ended and the physician retired to his private chamber, when the pent-up curiosity of the women found relief in an eager questioning of his grandson; but Abdul Karīm could tell them nothing,

he had been out on the *bur-ra* shooting sand-grouse with Bakhtawar the *shikari*, and *Dada* had gone off to the Munshi Sahib's house, on receipt of a note brought by a *chupprassi*—but Bakhtawar had told him that there was a great stir in the bazar, that news had come from the north, that there had been a great fight with the English Government, and that all the sepoys had put themselves under the orders of the Emperor of Delhi—but Allah knew how much was false, and how much was true. There must be something in it or the *miahji* would not be so troubled.

Here Amina Beebee was called to by her husband and the party broke up, Amirun to wash up the dishes which had been used, and Fazilla to lay another cloth for the women's meal. As soon as the aged couple were alone the wife eagerly demanded what had happened.

"An evil hath surely fallen upon us," said the old man as he motioned to her to sit down, "but Allah is great, so why should we fear? Listen! at an early hour this morning the Munshi's chupprassi brought me a note

from his master, asking me to see him on a matter of great importance; thinking it might be something in connexion with these rumours that have been flying about, which Allah knows are sad enough, I went. I asked for the deputy Sahib and was ushered in, Karīm-ullah meeting me at the door of his room, which he has furnished just like that of a Feringhi Sahib, high chairs, and tables, writing-desks, and books: having received me with great affability he made me be seated, and then he shut the door, as he wished our conversation to be secret; hai! hai! that we should ever have had it; what shall I say, how shall I describe the scene?—in short, he wants to have our Fazilla for his wife."

"Fazilla for *his* wife," almost screamed the old woman, "for *his* wife, hai! hai! touba! touba! I would sooner she were dead, ay dead, for though he is thy own brother's son, Sahib, and though he is high in rank and favour, he is not a good man, he is not a good man, and Fazilla is betrothed to our Abdul Karīm, who is a jewel."

"It is true, Meri jau, and I have pledged my faith to Abdul Karīm, and will not retreat, and so I have made an enemy, and a powerful one, of my nephew."

"Astagfurullah! why so, surely he respects thee and thou hast had weight with him."

"I tell thee, Bibi, he is henceforth mine enemy; if thou couldst but have seen his face when I told him it could not be, and that he must not think of Fazilla, thou wouldst have said it was the face of Eblis, the Prince of Evil."

"Bap-re! bap-re! what are we to do?"

"Allah knows, and he will guide us, but of one thing we may be certain, and that is Munshi Karīm-ullah will not be thwarted without a struggle, so we may look for trouble."

"But what can he do, Miahji, he cannot eat us," replied the old dame, straightening herself, and looking as fierce as her mild countenance would admit of.

"What can he do?" repeated her husband sadly; "in the best of times an un-

scrupulous man can do much mischief, but in the days that are coming on us, no one can be safe."

"Soobhan Allah! what new thing is this?"

"It is no new thing, Maie, but something that has been brewing for long; the English Government is said, whether truly or falsely, Allah knows, to have been trying by secret and underhand ways to corrupt and defile the minds and religion of the people, both Muslim and Hindu, and so the people have risen against the Sirkar and the army has revolted, for they will not use the new cartridges made with pigs' fat, and the Emperor of Delhi is again ruler of the land, and the English power is broken."

"Shekhji! that is not true, is it?"

"Who knows, but this I know, that the English, whether right or wrong, will not be driven out easily, and they fight like Rustams, and therefore we shall have much trouble, and a long war, and people will wish to take the winning side, for fear of losing their heads, and many will perish."

"Hai! hai! what shall we do, what shall we do?"

"Remain quiet; I wish the English no harm, their rule has been the best and the most tolerant. I do not expect to get more favour from Hanafi rulers, but whatever comes we must be resigned and be careful not to expose ourselves to suspicion. We will go on in our old way and trust in Allah; but, Bibi, I am afraid of Karīmullah, he will not remain quiet in these perilous days; he will watch, he will be zealous in the aid of the British, but he will not fall with them, if they fall, and I fear that in the unsettled state of affairs he may have opportunity for doing us mischief."

"What would he do against his father's brother, he dare not!"

"Family ties prevail not with a man of his character, he is ambitious, and he is intolerant of failure, he can bend to a blast, but he loses none of his strength for the spring when the time comes. When we parted, he seemed resigned to his fate as far as his word went, but there was the

gleam in his eye, and the curl of his lip, which belied his speech. He will do us harm if he can, and therefore, wife, keep the girl as much in thy sight as thou canst till I can find a refuge for her, and if that old tattler Amirun asks ought of thee concerning our conversation, tell her it was about the news which is already circulating in the bazar, and which of itself is enough to sadden any peaceable man."

Fazilla was singing gaily to herself as she flitted about doing her household duties, and the old woman's eyes filled with bitter tears as she looked at her, and thought of the trouble in store, and she wondered how the Munshi had fallen in love with her, for Fazella had been kept away from him, and she knew not how he could have seen her. Sad times were indeed coming, but Allah was the supreme controller of events, and the fate of all was written on their foreheads.

The Munshi in the meanwhile had not taken the matter so calmly, though his parting words had been of a resigned character. No sooner had the old phy-

sician turned his back, than he struck his clenched fist on the desk and hissed between his teeth,—

"We shall see, we shall see whether that young hound Abdul Karīm shall have her. No, no, my fair young Syedani, you shall have a worthier mate than that puny boy, the time is coming when they shall all be under my hand."

He turned up the sloping lid of his escritoire, and touching a secret spring, took some papers out of a drawer, which suddenly flew open.

Various emotions seemed to pass over his face, as he sat eagerly scanning the memoranda in his hands; there was no longer the studied impassibility of the Oriental, as he sat in privacy, and varied were the expressions that came over his hawk-like features as he anon muttered,—

"Mān Sing is ready to join, so is the Nana, Holkar and Scindhia are uncertain, but they will come too, the Hyderabad people are curs, but all Oude, Rajpootana, and Central India, are ripe for revolt; the army is with the cause to a man, so writes

Syed Hyder Ali: he is too sanguine, too sanguine; the English fight hard, and those idiots at Merut broke out too soon; but something may be made out of it, whichever side wins, and queer things can be done in unsettled times, so look out Hakīm Sahib, and your pet grandson."

At this juncture the sound of approaching horse-hoofs made the Munshi rapidly put up his papers, and close the secret drawer, and in a few minutes a *chapprassee* announced a European visitor.

Mr. Pereira was a Portuguese of pure blood—not one of those numerous descendants of earlier settlers who bear the name in India—and he had since his arrival in the East, managed to amass considerable wealth, as an Indigo planter. He began life on slender means, but was now owner of several large factories, and was the wealthiest man of the neighbourhood; rumour had it that much of this wealth was wrung by oppression and fraud from the poor ryots, and rumour is often right; dark tales were told of deeds done by the hard old Planter, and his factotum

Beni Sing, of obstructive ryots slung down deep wells to allow of cooler reflections, of the bastinado, and the thumb-screw; and even of darker deeds done, as were supposed, by *dacoits*, but of which Beni Sing knew somewhat.

But at last the overseer and his master had a quarrel so serious, that the haughty, pampered Rajpoot, smarting under the lash he had so often applied to others, went off vowing dire vengeance.

A few nights afterwards one of Mr. Pereira's finest factories was in flames, at another, one of his assistants was attacked and killed, whilst the house was plundered of all that was valuable. Mr. Pereira knew that Beni Sing was at the head of the gang, and he knew the desperate character of the man, and never went out of his house unarmed. This state of things continued for some months, but at last the Dacoits were hunted down, and their leader captured, partly by the treachery of one of the band bought over by Mr. Pereira's gold, and Beni Sing was now in irons in Gya Jail.

Mr. Pereira and Munshi Karīm-ullah were very good friends, and the friendship had cost many a poor ryot dear, for what chance had the miserable, unlettered cultivator against the unscrupulous Portuguese and his bought ally the deputy magistrate? In one thing only did the Munshi feel inclined to run counter to his friend, but in that matter he was powerless; the deputy's sympathies were more with Beni Sing than with his master, and the overseer was useful to the ambitious Mahomedan, but the case was one beyond his powers, and the English Judge sentenced the Rajpoot to a long term of imprisonment.

However, Karīm-ullah was too much the man of the world to let one word of sympathy for the dacoit escape his lips, and he cordially congratulated the Planter on the incarceration of his enemy.

Munshi Karīm-ullah saw at once as his friend entered, that something was wrong. The Planter's usually pale face was livid, and he almost gasped out as he grasped the deputy's hand,—

"He has escaped, he has escaped!"

Karīm-ullah had no need to ask who it was to whom the other alluded, and whilst he framed a sympathetic reply, he rapidly revolved a plan in his own head. This escape was most fortunate; but he pretended to be greatly surprised, and asked for details.

Mr. Pereira seated himself, and wiped his heated brow.

The convict had been sent down with others to the Presidency Town preparatory to transportation, and whilst in the forest-clad range of hills in the vicinity of Sherghati, he broke from his guards, and was lost in that tiger-infested jungle.

"That man must be recaptured, Munshi Sahib," continued the planter. "I will give five thousand rupees for him, dead or alive."

"Dead, so much the better," remarked Karīm-ullah, with a smile.

"Yes, yes, far better, far better, I think I would give ten thousand for his head, for he has sworn to have my life, and I know the man of old, he will stick at nothing."

"He was a useful servant of yours," said the Munshi, with a quick glance.

But the irony was lost on the old man, who was full of the terror of his new position. He had barely realized his security, when the news came like a thunderbolt, that his enemy was once more free; he would soon be again at the head of a formidable band, and then there would be more factories burnt, and no safety for the master who had so deeply offended him. So long as the scars of the stripes still smarted on his back, there would be a lasting reminder of the vengeance to be carried out, and at every turn of the road, the old planter nervously clutched at the handle of the revolver that he carried day and night.

"Well, well, never mind, Mr. Pereira," said the deputy after a pause. "We will have the police after him, and I will let it be known that you will handsomely reward the man who takes him alive *or dead.*"

"Ay, that I will, if I could but see that rascal's head well off his shoulders, I'd give a heavy bag of rupees; do your best, Munshi Sahib, do your best. I am just

off to the magistrate to stir him up about the fellow; good-bye, good-bye."

The Munshi rubbed his hands and chuckled as the planter rode out of the compound.

"I don't know which is the bigger rogue of the two," he said to himself; "and as for the reward, Beni Sing has plenty of money too, he was not Pereira's overseer for so many years for nothing, and many a gold ring and bangle from a ryot's wife, has found its way into his hoard. But I must find out something of Beni Sing's whereabouts."

"*No! peada!* Khodawund!" replied a *chupprassi.*

"Go and tell Jeswunt Sing I want him."

CHAPTER XV.

THE fort of Asālgurh was a large quadrangle flanked by ponderous circular bastions, with two gates on the northern and southern faces, protected by demi-bastions on either side.

There was a moat, but from long neglect it had become dry and useless, and in part was overgrown with bushes, and, in fact, one part of it had been included in an orangery. Inside the walls were various buildings. First the visitor would find himself in a spacious court-yard, with directly in front of him the *Diwan-i-Am* or hall of audience, beyond which was the *Diwan-i-Khas* or private hall, to the right was a sort of two-storied barrack, containing accommodation for the garrison servants and officials, to the left a lofty pile of buildings contained the Zenana, or

women's apartments. The *Shish Mahal*, or hall of crystal, the Rani's reception-room, was on the ground-floor, also the *Hummam*, or bath, and behind was a garden laid out with fountains and cascades, and a pleasant pavilion overhanging a tank full of fish, so tame that they would come and eat out of one's hand.

The defences had been strong, but all had suffered from decay.

Early one morning, in April, 1857, might have been observed a certain amount of bustle and excitement in the court-yard, where the Thakoor's retainers, clad in their best, were assembling.

In the Diwan-i-Khas carpets were laid down, and on the raised dais was placed a richly embroidered *Masnad* or throne, of gold brocade, with cushions and bolsters for the arms ; in front lay the Thakoor's sword and shield on a cushion, whilst the young chief himself, smothered in cloth of gold and jewels, sat on the masnad, surrounded by mace-bearers and attendants with peacock feather fans. On his right stood his Diwan or prime minister, whilst various

other officers of inferior grades were ranged in order behind.

A visitor of rank was expected at Asālgurh, hence all this display of pomp, for usually the fort was a dark, gloomy sort of place, with listless guards, and lazy slipshod servants. Little was known amongst the retainers regarding the expected stranger, but it was rumoured he was in some way connected with the royal court of Delhi, and the Rani's orders were that he should be received with all the pomp and dignity that she could afford. Of course the visit was ostensibly to the young Raja, though, in reality it was to his mother, whose well-known energy and masculine character were the theme of conversation in the Moghul city.

A brief space of time had elapsed after the young chief had taken his place, when a flourish of trumpets at the great gate announced the arrival of a cavalcade which had been sent out to meet the envoy, and soon the heralds proclaimed the advent of His Excellency Nawab Syed Hyder Ali Bahadoor.

Though the young Thakoor was a boy of six years only, he rose to meet his guest with all the aplomb and dignity of a man of sixty, so early is self-possession developed in the Indian youth, and followed by his officers he went forward to the entrance of the Diwan-i-Khas to greet the new comer, as he alighted from the elephant which was sent to carry him to the fort.

The envoy was tall, and of a noble appearance, dressed magnificently, in velvet and gold embroidery, and costly cashmere shawls. He was a man of courtly and dignified manner, and his greeting of the little rajah was deferential and free from any patronizing tone, such as might have been used by a man of middle age to a child of tender years. On the part of the young Thakoor, there was no shyness or hesitation. He made his little set speech of compliments, introduced his visitor to his officers, and bowed like a little old courtier.

The Syed was then lead to a seat on the masnad, where complimentary speeches were made, and a general conversation

ensued, in which the Diwan and other principal officers took part.

No illusion was made by the Syed to political matters, it being well understood that his mission was to the Rani. As soon as the formal interview was over, the young Thakoor and his Diwan conducted the stranger to the apartments prepared for him, where, later on, refreshments were served to him and his followers, and towards the middle of the day, the envoy received a message that the Rani would receive him at four o'clock in the Shish-Mahal.

The Shish Mahal was a large room adjoining the Zenana which took its name, signifying the Hall of Glass, from the number of mirrors that lined the walls. The windows on one side commanded a lovely view of the surrounding country, as the building towered over the walls of the fort, with the waters of the Bursati meandering through a fertile valley, bounded by the blue hills in the distance. On the other side of the room they looked down on an orange garden.

The Rani received her guest in state, with her son, and the Diwan, and other functionaries around her. She and several of her handmaidens were unveiled, and the Syed was struck with astonishment at the queenly and haughty beauty of the still young princess. She received him with gravity and condescension, inquiring after his health and apologizing for the accommodation she had to offer, and the smallness of the retinue which she had sent to meet him.

"We are not now what we were, Nawab Sahib," she said with a bitter smile, "the English have shorn us of much of our dignity, and give us but a pittance out of our own possessions."

But the envoy declared that the accommodation was princely, as was also the escort; in fact he said it was so necessary to him to keep his visit a secret from the authorities at Amānpur, that he had purposely travelled with only a couple of attendants, and had not desired any show that might attract attention.

"If any slave of mine dares to mention

your visit outside the walls of this fort, I will have his head stuffed into a bag of chillies," replied the Rani, knitting her pencilled eye-brows, "see to that, Diwan."

"Protector of the poor! it shall be made known to all. No one shall say a word."

"The great Badshah, the Emperor of Delhi, has deputed me," continued the Syed, "to convey to you the expression of his regard and satisfaction, and to confirm to your son the rank, title, and privileges enjoyed by his father and his ancestors, who have always been the faithful adherents of his dynasty from the time of Akbar the Great and Aurungzebe, and he has commanded me to present to your Highness an autograph letter, which I beseech you to receive from my unworthy hands."

So saying the envoy took from a silver salver borne by an attendant a rich handkerchief of cloth of silver scented with attar of roses, which he unfolded, and produced an envelope of large size made of crimson satin, richly embroidered with gold and seed pearls, and this he placed in the

hands of the Rani, who reverently raised it to her forehead.

On a given signal the envoy was now invested with a robe of green and gold kinkhab-pur, attar was brought in, the audience terminated, and the guest returned to his apartments.

The Syed had, however, hardly divested himself of his dress of honour, when a confidential messenger arrived from the Rani, appointing a private meeting at nine o'clock after the dinner, which would be served for him in the pavilion in the orange garden, under the walls of the Shish Mahal.

The orange-garden was a quadrangular space enclosed by high walls with round towers, surmounted by cupolas at each corner. In one tower was a well, with an apparatus for lifting water into a large reservoir built on the roof of a bath-house, in which the ladies of the zenana could disport themselves in marble basins fed by showery fountains. The garden was laid out in meandering walks mid groups of orange and citron, custard-apple and pomegranate trees, whilst rose and

jessamine bushes scented the air. A marble conduit, studded with fountains fed by the reservoir we have just described, extended nearly the whole length of the garden, and was terminated by a pavilion of white marble consisting of an ornamented roof supported by many curiously carved pillars, the water of the conduit passing under the floor of the pavilion dashed over a cascade to a pool on a lower level, and the marble steps over which the water flowed were ingeniously hollowed out into recesses, in which on festive occasions were placed small lamps to illuminate the fall.

The place was strictly private, and was used only by the Rani, her immediate attendants, and those to whom she gave admission.

By her orders the Syed's evening meal was spread in the pavilion, which in a sultry summer evening was the most delectable part of the fort.

The moon had risen before he entered, and the subdued light on the waters, the sparkling fountains, and the brilliantly

lighted pavilion, were very pleasing to the traveller who had for days made weary marches in heat and dust. The food was varied and excellent of its kind, though the Syed ate in moderation, and of the plainer dishes only.

The repast over, fragrant hookahs were brought, and a company of dancing girls amused the guest whilst he smoked, till on looking at his watch he remembered that the hour approached for his interview with the Rani, and bestowing largesse on the maidens he dismissed them. Shortly afterwards the same attendant who had delivered the message to him in the afternoon appeared, and after a low obeisance requested the Syed to follow him to the presence of his mistress. Threading the tortuous alleys of the orange-trees, which became more maze-like as they proceeded, the guide stopped before a door immediately under the Shish Mahal, the walls of which formed one of the boundaries of the garden.

Here he knocked, and it was opened from within by an attendant with a lamp, who

lighted them up a special staircase leading to the zenana.

At the door of an anteroom the attendant told the envoy they had orders to go no further, and that slaves of the harem would conduct him to the Rani.

He passed through the doorway and found himself in a small chamber of white marble, inlaid with an arabesque pattern in yellow and black. Here an elderly female servant requested him to enter a door to the right, and on doing so the Syed found himself in the presence of the Rani of Asālgurh.

She was attended by two of her handmaids, both handsome-looking young women, of rather masculine type, which is not uncommon amongst the Rajpoots of Central India, but the Rani herself was a still more striking example of stalwart beauty, of robust form and more than average height. Her queenly carriage and beauty made considerable impression on the Mahomedan courtier, who had seen the fairest of many lands. She was very fair for a native of India, of the most

delicate shade of what is generally termed, in speaking of Easterns, wheat-colour, with a slight mantling of carmine in the cheek, which would remind the traveller of the fair daughters of the Vale of Cashmere. But the Rani had a more Grecian profile, her forehead was broad, her nose straight, and well chiselled, her mouth small and chin well rounded. There was no mistaking the determined character of her features, and her large dark eyes had none of the Oriental languor, but were bright and glittering, and when angry the pencilled brows met in almost a straight line over the flashing orbs.

She was a worthy descendant of a long line of warrior princes, and of a very different disposition to her supine and voluptuous mate, the late Thakoor.

She received her visitor with easy and lofty courtesy, and making him sit down beside her, turned the conversation from the preliminary compliments and inquiries to the court of the Emperor and that of the Sultan of Turkey, from which country the envoy had but lately returned. After

half an hour's converse on general subjects, the Rani made a sign to her maids to withdraw, and as soon as they had done so, she eagerly turned to the envoy, saying,—

"Now, my friend, tell me the news, I am longing to hear what chance there is of shaking off the chains of our oppressors."

"All is going on well," replied the Syed. "The whole army is with us to a man. I have travelled far and wide, and have had meetings with all the native officers friendly to our cause of the various regiments. I have dwelt with them upon the injustice with which they are treated. What do they get by remaining in the service of the English? In the service of the Emperor of Delhi, they would become commandants of regiments, generals of divisions, rajahs and nawabs;—with the English, what are they to get? At the very utmost about a thousand rupees a year, less than what a beardless English ensign gets, and this only after fifty years' service! Are they ever entrusted with a command? Never, as long as there is a stripling of a Ferin-

ghi of seventeen years of age, and they with honourable scars, and breasts covered with medals, and hair as white as snow! And then for the men, is it not enough that the Government of the British should drain every drop of blood out of the sepoy, before he can retire to rest for the few remaining years of life that remain to him, but they must strive in every way to destroy his religion and all that he holds most dear;—cutting him off from his family and making him an outcast and an alien. For this they send him across the seas, where he has to mix with men of other caste. For this they try insiduously to undermine his faith to his own people, by mixing bone-dust with the flour that he eats, and anoint the cartridges with the fat of pigs."

At this the Rani's eyes flashed as she exclaimed,—

"But they have not done such a thing! they dare not commit such a sin."

"Whether they have or not," returned the Syed, with a peculiar smile, "it is not my province to inquire, I simply made

use of the rumour. Allah knows whether it be true or false. It serves our turn admirably, and I am not a man to quarrel with a chance weapon in a dangerous cause. Then there is hardly a chief that is not for us. One or two there may be who are cowardly, and will hang back for a while, but after the first successes they will come over too, and all shall be ours. Then shall the emperor single out those who have been conspicuously loyal, and shall restore the honour of their houses, ay, and add to them. What have the British done, but aggrandize themselves at the expense of the ancient rulers of the country? but the Taloogdars of Oude are not the men to sit down and spin, like old women, at the bidding of foreigners. Look at the injustice done to the Peishwa of the Muhrattas. Doondhoo Punt is burning to avenge himself. All Rajpootana is full of grievances."

"Ay, that it is," cried the Rani, stretching forth her arms. "Look at me, was I a sovereign princess or not, was my lord a pensioner of the Feringhis and cooped up like an owl in his castle? But the hour

of vengeance is coming. For every slight I have had I will have a life, and the pale Feringhis shall turn paler still, when they hear the name of the Rani of Asālgurh!"

She clenched her outstretched hands, and knitted her brows as she spoke, and the Syed looked at her with mingled curiosity and admiration. He had struck the key-note well, as he had done with many others. He had studied carefully the history of every noble in the land, and none knew better how to touch on the raw place, and see with the keenest satisfaction the victim wince under the revival of the story of his wrongs.

Skilfully he went on as he resumed the conversation, touching on the ancient glories of the Rani's house, probing her wounds as he dwelt on the fancied indignities heaped on her by the British. Had she now any power over her own people? Did not an English magistrate sentence her to pay a heavy fine for simply punishing one of her own servants? The wretch was flogged and died—it so happened he had a diseased spleen—but what of that?

In former days she could have had him trampled under foot of elephants, he and his family, and who would have questioned her right; but now she must needs be summoned by any white-faced boy, and fined, if she pinched the ear of a slave-girl. This was not right. In the time of the emperor the sovereign powers of princes were respected, but a company of white-faced traders came and bought up the rights of the nobles, and paid them with the stick,—touba! touba! are they to lie down like beaten hounds, and cringe and fawn on the hands that smite them. No, no, the time is coming when the princes shall arise out of their lethargy, and shall strike a deadly blow for freedom at the hated foe, and regain their former prestige."

And so the night wore on as the two speakers dwelt on the story of their wrongs, and laid deep plans of action against their common enemy.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHERE is Ursa Major this morning, papa?" asked Grace Lufton of her father, as he returned from his ride; "he has not been with me as usual in the garden."

"He has got fever, my love, and I have just given him a good dose of quinine, of which he highly disapproves."

"Poor old fellow, I hope he is not very ill—what shall I do without my old bear; I hate those other smirking, cringing creatures."

"Oh! he'll be all right in a day or two. If the quinine does him no good, I will call in McTaggart to see him. What have you been doing this morning, my little busy-bee? flowers as usual?"

"Come and see," replied the daughter, leading the way into her little morning room, which faced the flower-garden.

It was a pleasant little room, hung with Grace's pet watercolours—views from San Miniato and Fiesole, and one or two from the English lakes. The furniture was elegant, and suitable for a lady's boudoir, and the only thing that spoilt the appearance of the apartment was the useful but unsightly punkah, suspended from the ceiling.

The doors on the garden side opened out into a broad verandah, wherein hung cages full of birds—an aviary of pretty little, white-specked, crimson avadavats, bright green love-birds, and graceful paroquets, with heads like bloomy Orleans plums. In another cage was a talkative black Myna, whose accomplishments were varied, and who after mimicking everybody on the premises, from the gruff-voiced Haji, to the falsetto of the punkah-boys, would wind up with a most doleful imitation of the creaking of the Persian water-wheel in the garden.

Choice plants in pots enlivened the verandah, whilst in the centre stood a large glass fernery, full of rare specimens from Darjeeling and the Khasyah Hills.

From the steps of the verandah extended a broad gravel walk down the whole length of the flower-garden terminated by a masonry platform, called in India a *chabutra*, this was overshadowed by tall and graceful Sissu trees, and was a favourite spot for the early breakfast; a noble avenue of these trees stretched to the right and left of the *chabutra*, forming a charming walk, protected from the burning rays of the sun and resounding with the joyous songs of birds.

The garden was yet gay with flowers, although the season for the tender annuals of Europe was over—still the beds blazed with the dazzling tints of many-coloured portulaccas and escholtzias. Arbours in various parts were resplendent with masses of orange, gold, and purple, as they were covered with the Bignonia Venusta, the yellow Banisteria or the Bougainvillia; the Poiuciana Regia threw masses of rich crimson, relieved by feathery green foliage, against the clear morning sky, whilst nearer earth the tiny Nectarinia, the Indian prototype of the Brazilian humming-bird,

toyed round the slender trumpet-shaped flowers of the scarlet Russellia, or dived into the deep bell of a purple Argyreia.

The morning breeze was heavily laden with the scent of the *bela*, or standard jessamine, and the arbor tristis mingled with the almost oppressive odour of the mango blossom, from the grove in the distance, amid which the golden oriole flashed like a sunbeam, as it darted from tree to tree.

There was a drowsy creaking of Persian wheels, accompanied by the plash of the falling water, and its rippling through the channels made along the beds and lawns, as the gardener and his assistants turned with their feet, in the old historic manner, the grateful element on to the thirsty soil.

Grace Lufton thought the garden had never looked so lovely as it did on that morning, when she stood with her arm linked in her father's, pointing out to him the effect of a blaze of crimson Butea, relieved by the broad green bands of a group of plantains standing out against

a background of dark Loquat-trees, which as a study of colour she had endeavoured to commit to paper.

Mr. Lufton criticized the sketch tenderly, giving his daughter full meed of praise, but correcting some obvious faults, and then laying it down gently, he looked at the garden, and sighed.

"Ah me! I am fond of the old place, Gracie, for it was laid out by your dear mother, who was an enthusiastic lover of flowers—it was a jungle when we first came, but I have seen all the trees grow up—time, care, and water will work wonders. Many of the plants were brought from Bengal in Ward's cases;—there, that Bignonia Venusta, the Chamberlainia, the Bougainvillia, and yonder Petræa, the father of all the specimens in Amānpur, were slips but a span long, which I got up from Bankipore near Patna, in a box covered with glass. I have seen every fruit-tree planted, and have eaten many years of their produce, and God grant we may do so yet—but who knows? I much fear we are on the brink of a gulf of great

troubles, in which both life and property will be insecure. I would, my child, I had not been so hasty in bringing you out."

"And do you think I should have wished to remain at home, papa, in safety, whilst you were perilling your life out here?" exclaimed the girl. "No, indeed! I am very glad you did bring me out to share your lot, whatever it may be. But why are you afraid of troubles, papa, and what are we to fear?"

"Well, Gracie, you are not a politician, but you are a sensible girl, and a brave one, and therefore I tell you more than I would to some others of your sex,—what I fear is, what our rulers are blinding themselves to, a general up-rising of the natives, headed by a disaffected soldiery. I believe the whole native army is rotten to the core, yet if I were openly to give utterance to my opinions, I should mortally offend all such men as your old friend, Colonel Gray. It is strange the infatuation of the officers for their men, when signs are not wanting of a strong feeling of insubordination amongst them. And the storm which

I and others have long foreseen is breaking —we have already had the first thunder-clap at Barrackpore—a sepoy in one of the regiments there has attacked an officer, and neither the men nor the native officer of the guard interfered to save the Englishman, and I fear that the disaffection is not limited to the troops who have, or fancy they have, specific grievances. I see suspicious signs all around me—in wary questions amongst some of the leading men, and the insolent demeanour of the less astute—and, therefore, Gracie, as we are here, and cannot get away, I wish to make the best of the situation, and keep my eyes and ears open, and I trust you, my child, and therefore make a confidant of you."

Here the girl pressed her father's arm more closely to her side.

"You know I have encouraged you in that somewhat unfeminine accomplishment of shooting with the revolver and rifle, and I want you to keep it up, for every one that can pull a trigger may be wanted before long. If I could send you away, I would."

"Indeed, papa, I hope you will not think of such a thing; wherever you are, there I would be, fighting or no fighting. I am a pretty good shot, too; only think, yesterday I knocked over five bottles out of six in nine shots. Pint bottles, not quarts, papa."

"Well come, that is not so bad," replied Mr. Lufton, laughing. "I think you could dispose of a few rebels, if it comes to blows; but, Gracie, a sepoy with a musket is not an empty wine-bottle. How would your nerves stand the test?"

"My nerves will stand anything when those I love are in peril," replied the girl with flashing eyes, straightening herself.

Mr. Lufton pressed her closely to his side and kissed her broad forehead, and then he turned away as footsteps were heard. It was one of the servants, who said that the Haji was worse, and incoherent in his speech, so Mr. Lufton, followed by his daughter, went off at once to the little verandah-room where the old man lay.

The fever was evidently at its height, and the patient tossed wearily from side to side, muttering to himself, occasionally clenching his hands, and waving his right arm over his head. As Mr. Lufton bent over him, the Haji fixed his glaring eyes on him, and demanded in a fierce tone who he was.

"Don't you know me, Shere Ali?" asked his master.

"Who calls me Shere Ali? who are you? Ah, ah! I know you—you are Lokman—see! These veins are filled with fire! Can you cool them? I must away; my people are calling for me, the enemy is gathering. La-il-la-ha, Il-lal-la-ho!"

And he waved his hand over his head, as though he brandished a sword.

"Oh, do send for Dr. McTaggart, papa," pleaded Grace, "he is quite delirious."

"My love, I do not think Dr. McTaggart would be best pleased at coming out in the sun to see a native; he grumbles enough at people of his own colour who send for him in the heat."

"And yet he will rush out at any time of day or night for that horrid Rani of Asālgurh," replied the girl indignantly.

Her father could not help smiling, for the doctor's devotion was a source of considerable amusement in the station, though whether it was the old Scotchman's heart or pocket that was most concerned in the matter, was a subject of doubt; but he answered,—

"That may be, Gracie. McTaggart is a queer old creature, and doubtless thinks the government pays him a good salary to be ornamental to the station, for being useful is quite a secondary consideration. Young Beverly declares McTaggart has quite driven him into the arms of Cockle and Holloway, as he can never get any attendance out of him. However, joking apart, I think I can doctor poor old Ursa Major quite as well as McTaggart. Go into my dressing-room, and in the medicine-chest you will find a bottle of chlorodyne and a minim glass; if I can get the old man to take a dose, it will produce sleep and act as a sudorific."

Whilst the girl was absent, Mr. Lufton ordered the servants out of the way, and said that the patient must not be disturbed. This was partly done with the idea of preventing the Haji's ravings being the subject of talk in the household, for the master shrewdly guessed that the so-called peon had had a more active life on the northern frontier, and in these times it was necessary to be on one's guard. Perhaps in these incoherent ravings something of importance might be revealed.

"I have found nought of evil in him," muttered the Haji, "and if there are such men amongst his people, it would not be lawful. I have eaten his salt and said my prayers daily in his house."

Here Grace entered with the medicine, which her father poured out and mixed with a little water, but the old man dashed the glass from him, exclaiming, "It is wine! it is wine!" and with lowering brows he muttered the 113th chapter of the Quran.

"Let me try, papa," said Grace, kneeling down and taking the Haji's hand in

hers; the shaggy brows relaxed their fierce compression.

"Ah, Fatima, is it thou? They told me thou wert dead, slain by the sword of the Kaffir; thou and thy babe. Where hast thou been so long, my life, and left me to wander like a pilgrim, and to take service with strangers?"

The strong man's voice trembled, and tears rolled down both his grizzled and furrowed cheeks, and the smooth, fair ones of his young mistress. She held the glass to his lips, and said one word, "Drink." She feared to disturb the illusion and bring back the refractory temper. He swallowed the draught and suffered himself to be laid back, still holding her hand; and though he muttered slowly to himself for a time, in broken phrases in which the name of Hyder Ali was frequently mentioned, he at last fell into a calm, deep sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

PAUL STANFORD was considerably perturbed in mind as he sat in his little studio, with an open letter in his hand. Life had seemed a great blank to him for a day or two after the Luftons left Florence, but a better mood had succeeded, a feeling that now he was on his mettle, that he had an object to work for; that, instead of going on in the dilletante way he had been doing, there must be real earnestness in his work; he braced himself up for the task, or, as he expressed himself, "buckled to in reality." He worked for seven hours a day incessantly, and made such progress as quite astonished old Cardoni, who had hitherto looked upon his friend as a rich amateur, *un poco fanatico*. He heard occasionally from Mr. Lufton, to whom he wrote often, hoping that the father would show his

letters to Grace, so he wrote with his heart in his pen, and adorned his pages with numerous sketches, which Mr. Lufton considerately handed over to his daughter.

Once she had been permitted to write, in return for a birthday-gift Paul sent her through her father, and that precious letter had been worn next his heart ever since. Nay, Mr. Lufton had done even more, for he was not a man who did things by halves. At the same time he sent Paul from himself a miniature of his daughter, beautifully executed on ivory, and that lay with the letter on Paul's broad chest, but he did not further relax the rule about correspondence between the young people. Miss Blatter had been a good friend so long as she had remained with the Luftons. She actually went out to India in the same steamer, and joined dear Joe at Bombay, and her letters up to that time were very precious to Paul, but, ungrateful young man, they lost their charm when the party separated on landing, save now and then when Miss

Blatter had a letter from Grace, which she invariably sent off to Florence.

Miss Blatter's style was chatty and diffuse; she rambled about from one subject to another like a bee amongst blossoms, and from her first letter after the prostration of sea-sickness, he learnt that his accomplished Oriental friend had been one of their fellow-passengers, and that he had been most attentive to her, but that Grace disliked him excessively, and repelled all his advances towards acquaintanceship, and Mr. Lufton was decidedly cold to him. She however had found the Syed a charming man, and if there were many like him in India, she was quite sure she should like the natives very much indeed. There was so much dignity and polish about him. Latterly her letters had been of the alarmist type. There were queer rumours in Bengal. One of the regiments had mutinied, and all the Bombay officers were sure the whole Bengal army was disaffected. They were so pampered and spoilt. She hoped dear Gracie and her father were in a safe place, but people

were beginning to be alarmed, although the infatuated Bengal officers pooh-poohed the notion of danger.

Paul knew Miss Blatter's style so well that he paid but little heed to her gloomy anticipations, but a letter from Mr. Lufton had greatly disturbed him. In it he alluded to the uncertain state of feeling in the country, and the fear that a great catastrophe was impending, still he felt certain that England would come well out of it, but at what cost no one could say. The fancied security of the rulers and the deliberate disregard of the obvious signs of danger around could not but lead to disastrous results; he would not care so much if all the women and children were out of the country, but it was too late to think of that now. If he had been situated on the Ganges, or other great line of communication, he would have sent Grace away either to Calcutta or Bombay, but it could not now be done. Between those places and Amānpur lay large native states, through which the road was not always safe, even in peaceable times, so that as

their bed was made, so must they lie on it, and be thankful if it turned out softer than they expected.

Paul read the letter twice through, as though in a dream. The thought of his loved one being in danger, and he not near to help her, was agony to him; but after the first shock came the impulse for action. Starting to his feet, he exclaimed, "I will go at once! I cannot stand this! surely her father will think all the better of me for doing so! I won't lose a day! not an hour!" Sitting down, he dashed off a few hurried lines.

"Hi, 'Nunziata."

"Si, signor!"

"Give this note to Signor Luigi when he comes, and wash my palette and brushes, and put things straight, and shut up the studio till I come again."

"Si, Signor Paolo, how long will you be away?"

"Don't know, 'Nunziata, I am going to India, and that is far away."

"To India! 'Stissima Donna! to India among the black pagans! why that is worse

than your going amongst the Calabrese last San Giovanni come twelve months; oh, Santa Maria! ora pro nobis! Signor Paolo, you have put my head in quite a whirl, and what *will* Signor Luigi say when he hears."

"Never mind, 'Nunziata, I'll come back all right and bring you a gold chain and a monkey; here is something to go on with."

"Grazie tanti, Signor Paolo, sure I will hang up a voto in the Santa 'Nunziata, and say three aves every Sunday for you, till you come again; ma che cosa! all the way to India; may the blessed Virgin protect you. Addio, addio! what haste, what haste, and to go to a country of black pagans!"

But Paul was by this time half way across the square.

Equally astonished was his factotum Leonardo, when his master urged him to pack up a portmanteau at once. "Per andare al India! per Bacco! che cosa! ma gl' Inglese son tutti cosi," tapping his forehead as he gazed around at the chaos of clothes, boots, revolvers, &c., which Paul tossed out on the bed as a selection

of what he wanted to take, and which he left Leonardo to pack whilst he hurried away to his bankers, to arrange for funds and take a seat in the next coach.

A few days after Paul stood on the deck of a small steam-packet belonging to an Italian company, which was labouring its way out of harbour in the teeth of a hard Mediterranean gale.

What agony of mind he suffered as the wind drew more and more ahead, and the brave little vessel held on in spite of it. If he missed the P. and O. steamer at Suez he would have to wait long, and every moment was precious. But the wind was foul also for the Marseilles boat, and that was some consolation, still the wretched results of the log! The storm howled and whistled through the rigging, and the sharp prow of the little steamer plunged into the waves in a manner most alarming to sundry old ladies on board, who, cowering in their cabins, would give vent to groans and ejaculations, as a descending mass of water on the forecastle would make the little craft shiver from stem to stern,

and yet only some twenty or thirty miles a day with all this battling; however, an end must come to all things, and on the fifth day they steamed quietly and swiftly into Alexandria harbour, just forty-eight hours beyond the usual time.

Eagerly Paul scanned the shipping, and anxiously he put the question to the first official who boarded the vessel.

"Is the P. and O. steamer in?"

"No, signor, neither the P. and O. nor any other steamer have arrived since the gale."

This was joyful, but dire intelligence had been received from India, the great rebellion had begun. The news of the first outbreak was in the mouths of all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

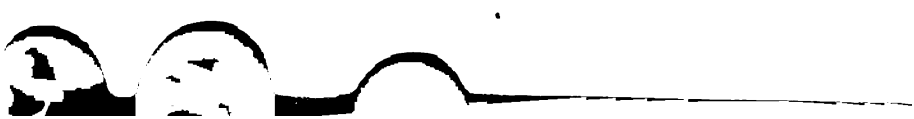
CALCUTTA was full of excitement when Paul landed. Every day fresh accounts came of tragedy upon tragedy, and fugitive parties of ladies and children arrived by every steamer. The minds of men were agitated beyond the ordinary influences of war, for the affair had been so sudden, its proportions so vague, and its horrors so startling, that they hardly knew what to think of it. This Frankenstein giant of a native army they had created had now turned upon them to rend them in pieces, and the magnitude of its strength was as yet unknown.

If the sister presidencies, and the Punjab followed the example of rebellion, there was indeed but little hope for the handful of Englishmen scattered about the country, and it would be long ere succours could

arrive from England. Gloomy visaged statisticians went about shaking their heads over the sum total of British troops, only 38,000 of which could be opposed to the 348,000 of sepoys. Bombay and Madras, and all the regiments of Bengal had not gone yet, it is true, but there was no faith to be put in them. One ray of comfort beamed on the dejected ones, a small, but highly efficient force was on its way to China, and Lord Canning, the man who amid all the doubts and fears of the timorous, the frantic counsels of the rash, and the abuse of the irresponsible, never for a moment lost his calmness, had sent an urgent message to Galle to stop the troops and hurry them on to Calcutta, and they were on their way.

Already had some help arrived from Madras, and Neil's Fusiliers were landing at the same time that Paul first stepped on Indian soil.

The young artist had been greatly struck with the peculiar beauty of the approach to Calcutta. The mouth of the river Hooghly and the river itself, as far as Diamond



Harbour, had nothing to recommend it to the eye of the painter; it was a turbid flood bordered by low, flat country, dotted with palm-trees; but as the steamer approached Garden Reach he found on either side, verdant lawns, stretching down to the water's edge, with noble-looking houses shaded by trees, and then as they rounded the point near Bishop's College, the fair City of Palaces lay before him with its broad river crowded with the ships of all nations, and the wide sweep of stately mansions extending in a semicircle in the back ground.

At first sight Calcutta does earn its title, though the palaces do rather come down on nearer acquaintance; still the architecture is in a way imposing. The houses are square and massive, each standing isolated in its garden, whatever be the regularity with which the streets may be laid out; they consist chiefly of three lofty stories, each surrounded by a broad verandah, supported by heavy Doric columns, with a flat terrace roof, heavy cornices and balustrade round the top,

whitewashed, with green Venetians and doors; they do look on the whole, imposing.

Paul learnt from old Indians on board, that Wilson's Hotel was the best place to go to, and accordingly, as soon as he could get on shore, he chartered one of the numerous rattle-trap hackney carriages, a thing like a broken-sided beer chest, on wheels, with a pair of wall-eyed, knock-kneed cat-hammed ponies, of unequal sizes harnessed with much rope, and a few thongs, and told the man to drive to Wilson's Hotel.

"Han Sahib, I know," replied the grinning apology for a driver, "Fibe rupee, sar, berry long way, plenty fass I go, fibe rupee, sar, Bilsun Hottel!"

"Go on with you, you jabbering ape," shouted Paul, shaking his fist at him, on which Jehu jumped back three yards, and screamed the louder.

"Fibe rupee! sar, fibe rupee!"

"I'll give you what is right," said Paul, "and a thrashing if you don't go on."

"Musta promiss fibe rupee? all right,

Bilsun Hottel," continued the son of Nimshi, mounting the perch he drove from. Cluck, cluck, whack. "Ah teri bhala howe!" whack, whack, "chel mera, bahudur chel; panch rupee bakshish, hai," cluck, cluck, whack! and the ponies were screwed up to a sort of broken-backed amble, in which they mutually supported each other by leaning well in, shoulder to shoulder, which had the effect of a lop-sided progression, as the heavier pony bore the smaller towards the ditch, the compensating balance being provided by a steady haul on the rope, which formed his rein, the result being the twisting round of his head, a position which forcibly reminded Paul of the arrangement of a whiting before it is cooked. There was a little trap-door sort of a window in front of the hackney coach, through which Paul could see the fishy wall-eye of the eccentric quadruped as he winked it, and protruded his nether lip at each whack of the cudgel. However, having started some sort of locomotion, the driver also made a whiting of himself, on the box, for his head appeared at

the window, and from the gleaming white teeth came a triumphant shriek, "Fibe rupee, sar! musta promiss, I go berry fass, five rupee, sar!"

"Go on, will you?" roared Paul, making a lunge at him with an umbrella, and so they went on rattling along the dusty roads through the ill-smelling bazars of Kidderpore, and over the bridge on to the open space called the Maidān, the great lung of the city. The Maidān is a large airy common, extending for some distance around the fortifications of Fort William, and bounded on the western side by the river Hooghly.

The ponderous guns sweep it in all directions, and under military authority, it is kept clear from obstructive buildings. A wide expanse of turf, intersected by a few drives, with a tree here and there, it only wants a few more of the last to convert it into a noble park, but here again the military authorities would object.

It was about sunset when the passengers landed, and as Paul drove along he passed numbers of handsome carriages filled with

languid-looking ladies and pale children, all going towards the Course, as the drive by the river-side is called; it is the Rotten Row of Calcutta, on one side lie rows of noble vessels moored in double and treble ranks, on the other, between the road and the glacis of the fort, is a broad side for the equestrians.

Paul's eccentric Jehù took the fashionable drive in his way, and the young Englishman was greatly amused at the novel sight. As they approached the crowded part of the course, which extends from Prinsep's Ghāt to the Burmese pagoda, the driver had to slacken his pace, and this gave his passenger ample time to scrutinize the gay scene before him; there were two streams of carriages of every conceivable description going in opposite directions; there were barouches and chariots, with gorgeous hammer-cloths and footmen in scarlet and gold liveries tenanted by Bengalees in puce and pea-green satins, drags driven by the bucks of the clubs; smart landaus and phaetons, and well-appointed barouches of the

wealthier Europeans, dog-carts, gigs, and buggies of the poorer ones, broken down *keranchis* filled with ragged natives, neat broughams with a fair face inside, whose beauty had mayhap been enhanced by rouge and pearl powder—a group of Abyssinians in one carriage, of Parsees in another, and Chinese in a third. Now the crowd makes way as the Governor General's body-guard come trotting down, followed by the smart carriage and four, with postillions in scarlet and gold, and the Lancers bringing up the rear; then a ramshackle old buggy with a Rosinante of a horse, driven by dusky Mr. Pereira and his brunette daughter, in ringlets and a macaw-coloured dress. Perhaps in the midst of the throng of the gayest, would appear a Sans-culotte of a Bengalee on his hackery, twisting the tails of his bullocks with horrible contortions, and ingeniously-worded oaths, as he endeavoured to get out of the way of the uncongenial company.

On the glacis of the fort rode a mul titude of cavaliers, some in uniform and

others in civilian dress, with not a few fair ladies on mettlesome little Arabs. Altogether the scene was unique and most interesting to Paul, who in all his travels had never seen the like before; but there was an aspect of gaiety and light-heartedness about it, that struck a chill to his heart, as he thought of the horrors that were being enacted in the land, and the terrible uncertainty of the fate of one he held so dear, and he felt almost savage at the people for venturing forth from their steamy houses to breathe the cooler sea breezes of evening, and to wear even the semblance of unconcern. Yet had Paul looked more closely as he went along, he would have seen traces of sorrow, and tears, and anxiety in pallid and care-worn faces and thoughtful brows, but people cannot always carry their hearts upon their sleeves for daws to peck at, especially among the younger and more elastic minded; even in the deadly siege, when death is reaping all around, and men go with their lives in their hands, whilst the iron hail and whistling shells hiss and

crash around, you will find light-hearted parties with jest and song, and it is as well it should be so. But the gay scene on the Calcutta Course saddened Paul's heart, and he longed for the broad pinions of the eagle, that he might mount high and swoop down on the spot where his loved-one was, that he might defend her or die with her. Oh this terribly slow locomotion! this vile land of delays, with no means of pushing on, it was agonizing to him, to think of what might be happening whilst he was thus striving to get near.

At Wilson's hotel he found every room occupied, not a corner to be had for love or money. "Very sorry, sir," said the civil manager, "but I am afraid if you try the other hotels you will find them equally full just now; have you no friends in Calcutta, sir, who could put you up, for you might have less hesitation in taking him unawares here than in England; people in India are accustomed to put up friends at a moment's notice."

"Well," said Paul, after a moment's thought, "there is an old school-fellow of

mine, of the name of Harding, who came out to Calcutta in a merchant's office some years ago; if I could find him, I daresay he would put me up; Alonzo Harding, do you know the name?"

"Couldn't have a better man, sir; go to him by all means, resident managing partner of Messrs. Standwell and Smiley, lives in a grand house in Chowringhee Road, has all his ices and confectionery from us. I give you the exact address, here it is, sir; I'll tell your driver where to go. Here Durwan, make the man understand, No. —, Chowringhee Road, Harding Sahib Ka Kothi."

Paul hardly liked this unceremonious way of proceeding, but he could not lie all night on the Maidān, and after all he had heard much of Indian hospitality, so he suffered himself to be driven through the large gates, at which stood a porter with an imposing red turban and scarf. The walls of the spacious portico echoed as the half-naked driver urged his moribund steeds on with loud clucks and objurgations, but the well-dressed servants who

stood by seemed to take it quite as a matter of course, and gave no sign of surprise, which rather consoled the young man, who was somewhat ashamed of making his appearance in such a vehicle.

Paul asked in English whether Mr. Harding was in, and held out a card which a venerable-looking old servant took, and asked him to alight. Paul guessed this more from his manner than from his speech, so he shook his head and motioned to him to take the card upstairs. In a few minutes he heard a manly voice, which had a ring of his old school chum about it, shouting to him by his Christian name to come up stairs, as he was in deshabille, "taking off his riding toggery and dressing for dinner."

The meeting was most cordial; had he been Paul's own brother, he could not have been more affectionate.

"By Jove, old fellow, if you had gone through Calcutta without coming to me, I'd have never forgiven you. Now, no excuses, your room is ready, and stay as long as you like."

"Thanks, my dear fellow," replied Paul, "but I must be off to-morrow."

"Off to-morrow! off to-morrow!" returned his friend with a blank face, "and where to and what for? Why, the whole country is demoralized at present; have you got any appointment to join, or are you going in for a go of fighting for fighting's sake? You were always a queer fellow, Paul, but this beats all; impossible to go to-morrow, my dear boy, why I shall have seen nothing of you by that time."

Paul thought it best to take his old chum into his confidence, and so, without further beating about the bush, he told him of his engagement, and of the great anxiety he felt. Mr. Harding listened thoughtfully as he went on with his dressing, and as Paul finished, he turned round from the dressing-table as he put the last touches to his white tie, and exclaimed,—

"Well, your are right, Paul, you are right, I'd do the same myself; as it is I long sometimes to have a rap at those blood-thirsty villains up country, and if I were a free agent I would join the Yeomanry Cavalry

to-morrow, and if I had any one I loved in danger, I'm shot if I would not be off and leave the house to look after itself; but you see I must look after the interest of my partners, and rest in ignoble security, though who knows, we may have a row in Calcutta yet. There are *badmashes*, I beg your pardon, but that is Hindostani for an out-and-out villain, and there are plenty of them in this place. Garden Reach has some thousands of cut-throats belonging to that King of Oude, who has got some of the best houses on the river banks, which you may have noticed as you came up. We have already organized a Volunteer force, and I take my turn of duty in patrolling the streets at night; but the question with regard to you is, how are you going up country, you cannot travel by yourself now."

"I want to get as far as Allahabad," replied Paul, "and then I must manage to strike across to Amānpur."

"Humph! an ugly journey in these days," answered his friend, "but here is a grand opportunity for you to get up to

Allahabad: Neil's Fusiliers are going up, and some of his officers are coming to dine with me to-night; I will see if you can go up with them. Of course, my dear boy, I should be delighted if I could keep you here, but after what you have told me I will not delay you a day or an hour if I can help it. You will want some fitting out according to the requirements of this abominable climate, but I will see to that. Now come along to the drawing-room, you need not dress for dinner, I'm a wretched old bachelor, and there are only a lot of he-creatures coming to-night."

Paul glanced at the furniture of the spacious room, which was of the most elegant description, and his eye lighted with a comical expression on a grand piano, on which his host noticing it continued,—

"Of course I give an occasional feed to the fair sex, one is expected to do that sort of thing sometimes, and then we have a little music, and then I have a chum with me who is un poco fanatico per la musica, and he strums a lot off and on. Here now, get into this vis-à-vis couch, we can talk

at our ease in it, and get all the south breeze."

The short twilight had already disappeared, and a bright moon shone in a cloudless sky, and the cool sea breeze from the south had supplanted the hot blasts of noonday and made gentle music in the drops of the chandeliers as they tinkled with each successive swell.

In the road below a constant stream of carriages dashed past, as people hurried home to dinner, from the band-stand and the Ellenborough Course.

Anon the melancholy wail of a stray jackal on the Maidān, answered by the hysterical screams of a pack of his brethren, made a strange medley of savagery and civilization, which was very striking to the new-comer. By-and-by the guests began to arrive; about a dozen in number, three or four officers, a couple of members of the civil service, a doctor, and the rest merchants and bankers, some men who had founded fortunes, others who were pressing on in the race for wealth, keen, hopeful, and self-confident. There was

but one topic of conversation as they formed into little knots waiting for the announcement of dinner, and that was the dire struggle that was then but just beginning in the land. It was discussed in all gravity, for no one cared to be light-hearted and jocular about it, for there was hardly a man there, nay, we may say in Calcutta, who had not relations or friends, who at that moment might be writhing in the agonies of a cruel death.

And as the conversation was continued at dinner, it was with a mingled jargon of French and Latin, and spelled-out names of places and people, so that the attendants should not understand what they were saying, for most Calcutta servants know English to a certant extent, and their ears were keenly opened for scraps of news wherewith to regale their brethren in the bazars. However, people cannot always harp on one string all the evening, and what with a little music, billiards, and a card-table, the time after dinner passed very pleasantly, and when Paul was asked before he retired for the night, how he

liked India, from the little he had seen of it, he replied from conviction that so far it was pleasant.

Next morning when Paul opened his eyes he could hardly realize where he was, everything was so strange: a large lofty room surrounded by doors, there were ten doors, no windows, three on the drawing-room side, two on the right leading into a broad verandah, three in front of the bed leading into the same verandah, and on the left two, which led into a dressing-room and bath-room; they were closed, but the Venetians of which they were composed were partly opened to admit air, whilst the light was subdued, the punkah swung lazily to and fro, and a few gorged mosquitoes clung to the mosquito net over his bed.

The door noiselessly opened and a silent-footed servant approached bearing a tray with a cup of tea and some toast. This was all very luxurious and pleasant, and quite different from life in England, or in fair Florence, and it seemed to Paul that he was a fainéant knight, to be thus lying

in ease when there was so much to be done, and he was so thirsting for action; so he sprang from his bed nearly upsetting the teapoy on which his *chota hazri* had been placed, and began his toilet at once. In the bath-room he found a large tub of cold water, and numerous porous jars of the same, ranged along a low wall which bounded the marble-lined floor of the moiety of the room devoted to splashing purposes; the contents of these he flung over his head, and emerged like a giant refreshed. Ere he had quite finished dressing, in which operation he had some difficulty in keeping at bay sundry servants who would insist upon putting on his stockings, and handing him his clothes piece-meal, and would have dressed him like a baby if he would have permitted it, his host appeared in riding costume, having been for a gallop round the race-course in the cool of the early morning.

"I looked in at daybreak, Paul, but you were fast asleep, and I thought it a sin to wake you, so I went for my usual canter; however I was at the same time mindful of

your interests, and despatched a messenger to a man of mine who knows every shop in the place, and I think he will turn out your kit for you in no time. However there are some things you want which I know you can get in the China bazar as well as any other place, perhaps better, so as soon as you are ready we will go; it is a queer sort of place and every new-comer, especially an artist, should see it; I wont tell you what it is like before we go, lest I should spoil the first impressions of the place, so come along, we will take a *ticca garry*, which is the orthodox conveyance on such occasions.

The China bazar is a long narrow street on the confines of the native town, with evil-smelling drains on either side, over which small bridge-like steps lead to poky little dens of shops, in which every conceivable commodity from the four quarters of the globe can be found. In the innermost recesses of these dens sits the old Bengalee owner, like a spider watching for his prey, whilst the younger members of his family or firm scout about to lure the flies into the net. As each

possible customer makes his appearance, either in carriage, palanquin, or on his own legs; he is pounced upon from all sides, and after some ineffectual struggles is carried off in triumph amid the self-congratulations of the victor, and the sneers and depreciatory remarks of the dissappointed ones.

As Paul and his host turned out of Dalhousie (at that time Tank) Square and into the narrow tortuous lane leading into the bazar, the driver slackened his pace, and immediately an eager-looking dusky form appeared at each door of the carriage, with other keen faces peering over their shoulders.

"Now for the dusky demons," said Mr. Harding laughingly.

1st Dusky Demon insinuatingly.—"Marnin, gentoomans; please come my shap, sar, ebberyting I got, good man for master, I Nilmony Chatterji, ole orij-nal jinral dealer, sar—don't lissen dat man, sar, tell to master plenty lie."

2nd D.D. "Come my shap, sar, ebberyting I got, I Micorari Ghose, ebbery gentooman knows me, all Calcutta come my shap, dont lissen dat man, he tief, his fader tief before

him!"—(here an interlude in Bengali, which we will spare the reader)—"I true man, hatmaster want? China curos'ties I got, pictur books I got, Jan Gasnil Kumpni, poder puffs[1], Rajiss nipe[2], brasiss,[3] shoe tie, Oddi Klong;[4] goot Peeber oddiklong, sar, sope I got, brune winser, Mak'sar ile,[5] pickles, Europe stores, beer, segar, come my shap, sar."

1st. D. D.—"All lies, sar, he not got notin, his shap no goot, sar, I got it all tings master want, ibry goods,[6] sar, Bombay warkbox, sar, goot Manilla seegar, China tea, tiperi jam, Rowland's Mac'sarlie; sardine I got, sar, longclot, hat I got, books I got, cur'os books I got, istokings I got, gunpowder I got, boots an shoes, furnature, plate an glass, jam pickle and Europe store, ladies dress piece, Rajiss nibe, carkiskroo, beer an wine, glubs, goot kid glubs, Pommitom, goot bear's griss pomitom, bilet poder, tilit binigar,[7] all goot tings, sar, real

[1] John Gosnell and Co.'s powder-puffs.
[2] Rodgers' knife. [3] Braces.
[4] Eau-de-Cologne, good Piver's Eau-de-Cologne.
[5] Macassar oil. [6] Ivory goods.
[7] Pomatum, violet powder, toilet vinegar.

Ingliss ting, not Niberpool[8] tings, good Ingliss tings."

Omnes chorus, "Come my shap, sar, come my shap, ebberytings I got" (*vigorous Bengali slang all round*).

The noise was almost deafening, and both the Englishmen laughed heartily at the hubbub, the carriage in the meanwhile making its way slowly up the bazar. At last Mr. Harding called to the driver to stop, and shaking his fist in the face of one or two of the most obtrusive touters, he cleared a way for Paul and himself, and they entered one of the dens, where they were met by a most obsequious old gentleman, who with a profusion of compliments handed them chairs, whilst the successful touter of the establishment stood at the door and exchanged pleasantries of a personal nature with the dissatisfied ones, who still lurked about like pariah dogs round a kitchen door, waiting for another onslaught.

"Well, Babu," said Mr. Harding taking a seat, "what have you got?"

[8] Liverpool.

"What master want? *ebberyting* I got."

"Leather watch got?"

Babu in deprecating tone, "*No*, sar, *that* ting not got, ebberyting *else* I got."

"Wooden hatchet got?"

"No, sar! *Sensible* tings I got, sar, *foolsery* tings I not got it, but master very jokative gentoomans, master will be very goot customer. Here is berry bootiful Bombay box sar, ibry box inlaid work, sar, master buy dis."

"All right, how much, Babu?" said Harding, winking at Paul. Of course they did not want the jimcrack, but he wished to draw out the old shopkeeper for the benefit of his friend.

"Dis bootiful ting, sar; master not find noder one like dis in Calcutta!"

"Oh, yes, yes, but how much, Babu?"

"Now, sar, I tell master troo word. Ebberybody know Nilmoni Sircar, honest man, oder mans dey hab askin' price and troo price, Nilmoni allus hab troo price—troo price dis box, sar, is hunder rupee."

"Hundred rupees! you old sinner!

why, that box is not worth a tenth of the sum."

"Oh, berry well," said the old babu, wrapping up the box carefully, and putting it away with an air of offended dignity. "What oder tings I show master? Dat box is sebenty-five rupee, my cost price, and trade is bad, mus' hab some profit. Master want any longclot? goot Horricks longclot?"

"No, I don't. What about that box?"

Babu, undoing the precious treasure once more, and holding up its beauties to the light, "Master shall hab ninety rupee, only my pipteen rupee profit—ninety rupee —(a shake of the head)—what master gib?"

"Fifteen rupees."

"Fifteen rupee!" shrieked the Bengali, "fifteen rupee! oh my! no, no, master is jokative gentooman. This Bombay box fifteen rupee? neber, sar! why dar is pipty rupee wort ob silber in it. But come, master shall hab it at cost price, sebenty-five rupee. I take to swear it my cost price, an' I poor man, an' get no profit!

Neber mind, I say let master take it. I makes love to master dis time, then noder time master come always my shop, and tell to all his friends dat Nilmoni Sircas is honest man, den I afterwards make my profits. Here, sar, I make it you one present—sebenty-five rupee, take it, sar!"

"You be hanged, babu!" exclaimed Harding, laughing, as he pushed away the proffered casket. "Come, Paul, this is an old miser; we can get nothing out of him, let us go to another man."

"Stay, stay, gentoomans!" frantically urged the shopman; "here, sar, fifty rupee! sar, sar! wait a bit, sar! forty rupee, sar! Lissen, gentoomans, it great shames to me you leave Nilmoni's shop in so fashion!"

"Come along, Paul; get into the carriage."

"Oh, sar, sar! here it is, sar! I poor man, I gib to master—here at master's own price, sar, pipteen rupee; but, oh dear! oh dear, I lose much money to get one goot customer! I make it present to master, here take it for pipteen rupee!"

So Harding suffered himself to be led back into the shop, and as he laughingly pulled out fifteen rupees, he said,—

"The old villain, he has got a good profit on it still. I did not want the thing, but it is pretty, and will do for my sisters at home. Now, Paul, we will go to business. Now, babu, *sola topees*[9] for this gentleman."

The great fight having been won, Paul's pith helmets and other travelling requisites were purchased at moderate rates and without much haggling, Nilmoni being satisfied that one at least of his customers was an old hand. And successfully eluding the other birds of prey, the friends drove back in time for breakfast.

At last the hour of parting came, and Harding drove Paul down to the river side, where, getting into a dinghi, they pushed across the Howrab, the site of the railway station.

"I hope we are not late!" exclaimed Harding, as a distant bell was heard, and he urged the boatman to make haste.

[9] Pith hats.

"I see the Fusiliers still about the station," remarked Paul, "so there must still be time."

"Then we are all right, it is not likely the train would go without them."

However, there was a considerable bustle and movement amongst the troops, so as soon as their boat touched the shore, they sprang out and ran up, leaving the coolies to follow with the luggage.

"Just in time!" exclaimed one of the officers, who had met Paul at his friend's house, "just in time, jump in! had an awful row with the station-master, a pompous blockhead, who would not delay the train a minute. However, he did not know the stuff the old colonel is made of. He told Neil that he commanded a regiment, but he did not command the railway, so Neil just put him in arrest, and there he is fuming with indignation and vowing vengeance dire."

"You should have seen the engine-drivers wink as the colonel ordered a guard to be clapped on the engine," remarked a young ensign, who thought the whole proceeding a grand joke.

"They are sensible Britons," replied the sub. "As for that station-master, he must be a lunatic not to realize the importance of our getting up as soon as possible, and after all, we shall not delay the train a quarter of an hour, my company is all safely stowed away, and the others will be in before two minutes more are over."

"Well," said Paul, laughing, "I thoroughly admire your leader's way of proceeding, and I also am grateful to the obstreperous station-master, for this little altercation has just given me time to get in; but for this I should have been late."

General Niel, seeing that his men were all in, now gave orders for the release of the station-master and drivers, and Paul, bidding his kind-hearted school-fellow farewell, sprang into his carriage, and the train in a few minutes steamed rapidly out of the station.[1]

[1] General Neil's arbitrary but very necessary proceeding was duly reported to the Government, with what result the reader may imagine, though it might not have been satisfactory to the injured station-master.

CHAPTER XIX.

JESWUNT SING was the perfect type of a Creole *latthial*—broad of chest and stout of limb, an easy-going, handsome swash-buckler, with a good-tempered looking face and perfect white teeth, neatly cut whiskers, and a turban jauntily cocked on one side, he looked a hail fellow well met, but was withal as deep a villain as ever escaped the gallows—only there was a sort of joviality about his villainy. If he had to commit a murder, he would preface it with a joke, and wind up with a chuckle. He was *sib*, as the Scotch say, to Beni Sing, though what the precise relationship was we are not aware—they were, however, true birds of a feather, had been partners in many a black deed, and it was through Beni Sing's influence with the Munshi that the *burkundaz* had got his place. Karīm-ullah liked to have a few

out-and-out rogues in his employ, and flattered himself he knew how to manage them. "Your honest fellows," he would say, "are owls—large-eyed, sleepy owls;—to hunt game we must have falcons." And Jeswunt Sing was his best thief-taker—no one knew his history except the deputy, and he knew quite enough to bring his subordinate to the gallows; but, on the other hand, Jeswunt thought he could make it hot for the Munshi too if he chose, so he troubled his head very little with misgivings, and now that he was a Government servant, he behaved circumspectly, only now and then getting a little fun when a witness had to be tortured on the sly, or a confession wrung by mysterious means from some obdurate criminal.

Jeswunt had been closeted with the Munshi for some little time, and then resting his heavy tulwar over his shoulder, an attitude which enabled him to throw out his massive chest, he came out, jerking an off-hand nod or two amongst the peons in the verandah, and strode off down the road to the Thanna.

At the door of the police-station was a tall Rajpoot peforming his ablutions preparatory to the midday meal.

"Well, Jeswunt Sing Bhai, has the deputy Sahib made you a Jemadar yet?"

"Arré bhai!" shouted the other in stentorian tones, although his interrogator was within arm's length of him. "Arré bhai—has the blind man caught a quail?"—after which sage remark he burst forth into an Ajhudyan love-ditty, and, entering the station, proceeded to make up a little bundle, whilst two young athletes of the service continued a lively conversation about a dispute with a grocer in the village over some flour and pulse, the interesting details of which were carried on in trumpet tones, although the talkers were seated *vis-à-vis* on their respective beds about thirty inches apart. Jeswunt Sing having made up his bundle, stopped his ditty and inquired,—

"Who is on the watch, brothers?"

"I am," replied one of the pair.

"Well, you are a nice man. How is the time going?—it is past noon, I know."

"No, it is not," answered the youth,

sauntering out to the door, where stood a vessel of water, in which floated a brass cup with a hole in it so calculated as to fill and sink in an hour. The hour was nearly up, and as the cup filled and sank the sentry struck twelve with a wooden mallet on a large gong, and, setting the meter afloat again, returned to his interesting discussion.

In the meanwhile Jeswunt Sing, throwing down a paper on the bed, told the other constable, "Give that to the Manadar Sahib when he comes, and tell him I've gone by the deputy Sahib's orders."

The ex-latthial had a long trudge in the heat of the day, but he did not seem to mind it, and carolled lustily a roundelay as he went, but after going a few miles down the dusty road, he suddenly struck off across the fields, and made for the distant jungle; a low range of sandstone hills lay before him, and the radiation of heat from them seemed to scorch the vegetation around, for, save a few stunted zizyphus and mimosa-bushes, which will grow anywhere, there was hardly a leaf on the soil; the grass under his feet was crisp and dry as the moss in an old bird's-

nest; the earth was reticulated with deep cracks, the effect of the summer drought, and, but for his stout shoes, would have burnt the traveller's feet. Not a bird or a beast was to be seen, save the indefatigable drongo-shrikes, or kingcrows, which, regardless of the heat, were seen hawking after insects; and as Jeswunt Sing toiled up the hillside, he was fain to take off his coat, and, folding it into a square, balance it on his head as a protection from the fierce rays of the sun. The summit gained, he looked down on a vast extent of undulating country intersected by deep nullahs and densely covered with jungle; after half an hour's further trudging he came to a halt by the banks of a stream, where he washed his hands and feet, and, taking out of his bundle a small bag of *suttoo*, or pease meal, he mixed some of it with water and swallowed about a dozen lumps of the uninviting mess, washing down his frugal repast with a copious draught from the brook. He then proceeded to change his clothes, taking off his constabulary uniform, and putting on a green *ungurkha* or tunic

and close-fitting drawers; he untwisted and re-tied his turban in a closer form, and passing a red handkerchief under his chin, he fastened it by a knot on the top of his head; thus hiding his whiskers, but allowing his moustaches to stand out fiercely, like those of a wild cat. He then made a bundle of his *burkundaz* dress, and diving into a small brake, he rolled away a big stone from the root of a tree, disclosing a deep hole, from which he drew a round shield of black leather studded with metal bosses, a powder-horn and matchlock, and a *khalta* or ammunition-bag. Depositing his bundle in the hole, he arrayed himself in his panoply of war, and stood the picture of an athletic freebooter—a *dacoit* or bandit. Jeswunt Sing did not linger long, but swinging his heavy matchlock over his shoulder, he set off with rapid strides. The jungle became more and more dense as he followed the course of the stream, which here and there dashed over rocky barriers; sometimes gliding in long calm reaches where the otter, disturbed in her noonday siesta, would look with wondering eyes for a

second at the toiling man ere she dived into the deep water; anon the very monkey would give a dismal whoop as the *burkundaz* passed under the tree where he and his long-tailed family were reposing, and once, as Jeswunt Sing crossed a sandy reach, he stopped, and, striking a flint and steel on a bit of rag, lighted the match of his firelock, for there were the fresh footprints of a wandering tiger. The banks were becoming more precipitous, and farther on came booming through the forest the sound of a waterfall. He now proceeded more slowly, casting anxious looks around; all at once he stopped, and listened attentively; the only sound, save that of the waters and the chirrup of the cicadas, was the monotonous note of the red-headed barbet —touk, touk, touk, touk, touk, touk, like the regular strokes of a coppersmith's hammer.

Jeswunt Sing laid down his matchlock on a rock, and, joining his hands so as to form a small hollow, blew through an aperture made by his two thumbs, and produced an exact imitation of the call,—

the bird stopped, and as the *burkundaz* listened again the call of a peacock rose from some bushes on the cliff to the left, to which Jeswunt Sing replied by the whoop of a grey monkey. The branches parted, and a tall man, attired like himself, appeared, scrambled down the rocks, and embraced Jeswunt Sing most cordially.

"Well, Beni Sing, brother, you don't seem much worse for your stay in jail, although your countenance has rather dried up." [1]

"Arré bhai—there was plenty to eat, but jail bread is like cinders between your teeth. So here am I, and for their doings some men's livers will have to run to water."

"You mean Pereira Sahib's?"

The outlaw's teeth gleamed savagely as he nodded assent.

"You know that he has been to the Munshi Sahib, and offered large sums of money for your head."

"Ha! ha! ha! and sent you, bhai, to come and take it—eh?"

[1] The Natives never congratulate you on your good looks,—they think it unlucky,—but always say you look thinner than formerly.

"The Munshi Sahib is too old a bird for Pereira Sahib, brother; he promised to have you soon, dead or alive, and in the meantime he has sent me to ask you to do something for him."

"Ah! the three legs of the tattoo are not broken yet, so he wants another ride out of him? That's it, bhai. And what will he pay?"

"He will give you his blessing and protection."

"Humph! I'd rather have something heavier, but, after all, it is good to have a friend at Court; but I cannot undertake the business myself, Jeswunt Bhai, I have more important work in hand; but I will give you any necessary men for the purpose, if you want them."

"Have you got the old band again?"

"Ay, that I have, and more too. There are stirring times coming, and Beni Sing will be a Bahadur yet. So you had better join the old band again, Jeswunt Sing, brother."

"Well, they do say the English *raj* is broken," said the constable musingly, "but

Bhagwan knows whether it be true; the *gora lōg*[2] are devils to fight.

"They shall be cleaned out of the country, not one shall remain alive, and Pereira shall be one of the first to die. I swear it." And the fire shot from the fierce black eyes as the outlaw shook his clenched hand on high.

"And pray what force have you got, brother?" asked Jeswunt Sing.

"There is the old band, and Rungia's men, who have come to me since their leader's death, and then, if it comes to blows in the open, I have promised to join Babu Koer Sing, who will take the field as soon as the Sepoys of the regiments at Dinapore are ready to begin."

"But will they begin?"

"Why not? Have not all the regiments in Hindostan sworn to aid each other in driving out the hateful usurper who would pollute them with pigs' fat in their cartridges and human bone dust in their bread? However, brother, have you eaten aught to-day? Come along to my dwelling-place."

[2] White folk.

They scrambled again up the rocks, and the dacoit leader strode on rapidly through the jungle till he came to a dense matted thicket of spiny bamboo; through it he led his comrade by a winding path hardly perceptible to the ordinary observer, and even then they had to force their way through the opposing branches, till at last they came to an open space on the margin of a nullah. Nothing of the nature of a dwelling-house was visible; there was a clump of bushes in the clearing, but nothing else, and to these Beni Sing made his way, and stooping down, he parted the low spreading branches and disclosed a trap-door, which, when lifted, revealed a flight of narrow steps. Jeswunt Sing knew the place of old, though it was hidden from most of the band, and so he dived down the dark hole without hesitation, and the two found themselves in a spacious underground cellar ingeniously devised, with windows in the side opening into the Nullah, carefully concealed from external view by shrubs. Thus an ample supply of light and air were obtained, whilst from

its subterranean character the place was cooler than most dwellings. The cellar was divided into two compartments, and from the inner one ran a long passage leading to another hidden trap-door.

Beni Sing's wife, a young and handsome, but sulky-looking woman, was busy making *chuppatis* for the afternoon meal, whilst an old crone, her mother, was rocking a child in her arms.

The two men laid aside their weapons and resumed their discussion about future operations till the repast was ready, when they sat down and speedily disposed of a goodly pile of cakes with a relish made of vegetables fried in mustard oil.

The outlaw ate like a famished wolf, and on his comrade remarking he had a good appetite, replied, "I have got work before me to-night, and so it is well to eat a good meal."

"What work, bhai?" asked the *burkundaz*.

"A good work, my brother,—an old account to square, and you may come too, if you like, but perhaps you had better not be seen in it. Where have you left your government clothes, Jeswunt?"

"In the old place by the Piperia Nala."

"I know. You won't want them to-night, so I'll make some use of them. Make yourself at home, bhai. Here, Maie! give Jeswunt Bhai a hookah and prepare him a bed. I must be off. Rām, Rām, bhai!"

The sun was yet high over the horizon, as it was but four o'clock, and the Dacoit leader, armed with sword and target only, struck off into the jungle, not following the course of the stream, but taking a more direct line towards the place where the *burkundaz* had hidden his clothes.

It took him but a few minutes to array himself in the government uniform with belt and badge, and after hiding his shield and dress, he took out of a small wallet a paper, which he perused with a quiet chuckle before he replaced it in his bosom; then slinging his sword over his shoulder, he rapidly took his way down the hill. Afar off, surrounded by its feathery palm-trees and conspicuous by its domes and minarets, lay the town of Susseram,—to the right flowed the meandering Sone with the piers of the gigantic railway bridge, then

in course of construction, looming in the distance, and here and there, mid groves and gardens, were dotted various indigo factories. There was an outlying police-station between the Sone and the city, towards which the Dacoit boldly made his way. He was a man whose daring soul rejoiced in danger, and there was a sort of grim humour in thus bearding his enemies in their dens. So he strode undauntedly on till he reached the door of the Thana, and greeted the sentry with the usual "Rām, Rām, bhai!"

"Rām Rām," answered the other; "where do you come from, brother?"

"From Gya-ji, brother, with a warrant from the magistrate Sahib for the apprehension of Beni Sing, who is supposed to be somewhere in these parts, and I am just worried out of my life in looking for him. A man in these jungles is like a snake in a Pān garden."

"True it is, bhai; but how can you, unassisted, do anything with Beni Sing? He is a Pehlwan, as strong as Bhima. I should not like to tackle him alone."

"Nor should I," replied the outlaw,

chuckling to himself at the turn the conversation was taking, "nor should I; but then, if I could find out his whereabouts I could get a force sufficient to capture him, and there is a good reward offered for him by the Sirkar."

"Ay, that there is, and Pereira Sahib has offered five thousand rupees for his head. Shabash! there will be all the more for us. Brother, don't forget to take me with you, if you find out anything about him. The Thanadar Sahib and other men have gone down to Deri Ghat to make some inquiries there to-day."

"All right, bhai, I will remember you; but can't you give me a smoke, and let me sit down a bit?"

"Of course I can. Come in; I'll get a *chillam* lighted in a minute."

Beni Sing sat down on a *charpai*, and cast an unconcerned glance around. He was in the little verandah in front of the single room of which the police-station was composed, the walls of which were decorated with various proclamations interspersed with rude and glaringly coloured

representations of Hindu gods and goddesses. Staring him in the face was a notice in Persian and Nagri, to the effect that, as the Government had offered a reward for the apprehension of the notorious convict Beni Sing, a further reward of five thousand rupees would be paid by Mr. Pereira of Nilapur.

The outlaw's quick eye lighted on a pot with gum in it, used for affixing these notices from time to time; and as his companion was busy preparing the chillam, picking out bits of coal from an ashy fire and blowing them into life, he drew the paper from his bosom, and deftly pouring a little gum over the back, rapidly pasted it on the wall beside the other.

He had barely resumed his seat when the *burkundaz* entered with the hookah, and they were soon blowing fragrant clouds.

"When did Pereira Sahib offer this big reward, brother?"

"Only to-day; he rode in with the paper himself, and gave it to the Thanadar Sahib, and they all went away together. Pereira Sahib is in a terrible fright of

Beni Sing" (the Dacoit could not resist another chuckle at this, whilst a wolfish expression crossed his face), "and they say he is going to leave this part of the country. He will sleep to-night at Pilakothi" (Beni Sing's eye flashed with intelligence, but his comrade went on smoking and talking), "and then he is going away for a time."

"I must see him before he goes," remarked the visitor decidedly.

"Then you had better go to Pilakothi to-night," replied the *burkundaz*.

"I will; and as I have not got much time, I suppose I had better be going."

"Wont you stay and see the Thanadar Sahib, bhai? he'll be back soon."

"No, no; I shall catch the Thanadar and lose the Sahib, and that will hardly do. I will come back to-morrow and see the Thanadar Sahib. Rām, Rām, brother."

So the sentry resumed his beat, and watched his visitor stride away with a swaggering air, till a bend in the road hid him from sight.

The Thanadar and his satellites duly returned, and the conversation for the rest

of the evening turned on the outlaw and his bold doings, and the money that might be gained by his capture.

Next morning, however, the little police-station was thrown into consternation when the report came that Pilakothi had been attacked and burnt during the night, and that Mr. Pereira was lying at death's door from many wounds.

"Beni Sing's work!" was the unanimous verdict, but the judicial mind of the old Thanadar thought it necessary to cross-examine the bearer of the news. There was no doubt about it. A servant of Mr. Pereira's, who escaped by hiding in the garden, swore he saw Beni Sing himself, that he led the attack with a hundred men at his back, and stood outside on the gravel walk whilst he ordered Pereira Sahib to be dragged out. The old European made a brave resistance, and got away, though desperately wounded, and crawled into a culvert in the roadway, where he lay till morning, and then the bungalow was set on fire. Beni Sing was in a raving fury at his escape, and

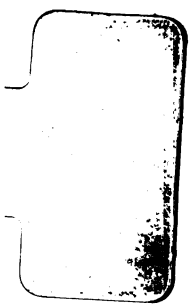
howled for Pereira Sahib's head, driving his followers at the edge of the sword into the flames to seek for his enemy's body, but it could not be found. His vengeance was incomplete; Pereira Sahib was still alive.

The old Thanadar turned to take down his sword from a peg in the wall, when he suddenly started with an exclamation of surprise. Beside the proclamation of reward for Beni Sing's arrest was another, and it read thus:—

"To all who read! Know this—that as the Government of the English have offered a reward for my arrest, let them do what they please if they can catch me, but as that Feringhi Pereira has offered for my head five thousand rupees, this is to give notice, that if any one will produce before me Pereira's head, I will pay him down at once ten thousand rupees. This I swear on Ganges water!

"BENI SING.

"Signed with his own hand."

END OF VOL. I.

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